Essays, Memories, and Reflections of World War II

By: 41st Fighter Squadron
Veteran
Richard DeBaugh

Introduction

The final reunion for the 41st Fighter Squadron was held in Columbus on April 9, 2005. At the reunion, veteran Richard DeBaugh gave this collection of his essays and musings of World War II for the Heritage Room in the 41st Flying Training Squadron. These essays were originally written for the annual 41st Fighter Squadron reunions. As you read these writings, you will gain insight into the role that the 41st Flying Buzzsaws played in the South Pacific during WWII. What a proud heritage the 41st has! You will also read an autobiographical account of a courageous young aviator who exemplified the ideals of duty and honor.

41st Fighter Squadron

Colorado Springs
1989

To my good friends:

From the lengthening perspective of forty-five years, I am offering this small package of half-a-dozen reflections, a couple of poems, and a trio of pictures for your collective memory banks. This package is, in degree, for the nostalgia part of our reunion; and my hope is that your affective modes will be reached and touched. This collection of "stuff" was a joy to assemble. If my joy becomes yours, too, it will all have been worthwhile. My writings are from the gut; you should know that fact. As personal reflections, they may not match yours. The subjectivity of this kind of thinking and feeling cannot accurately compare with yours, but perhaps you can at least understand and sense just what I tried to say to all of you. Also, please forgive my syrupy sentimentality.

In meeting together as a gaggle of aging eagles, and as we discover that of the things that fly, time is fastest, let us take pleasure in the significance of the great mutuality of our 41st experience.

Blue skies,

Dick DeBaugh

More Than Just Place Names'

Port Moresby, Nadzab, Gusap, Owi Island, Lingayen, Morotai. And there were other places with strange sounding names. They tell a tale. They fill memories. They were stopping-off places in the saga of the 41st Fighter Squadron, way stations to which young men and their machines came to do battle.

Each place, each encampment, had its charm, to use the word loosely. Each place also seemed to have its particular hell, to use the word specifically. Gusap, for example, was hacked from the floor of the Ramu River valley; wrested from wretched kunai grass that seemed to be made up of reeds of razor blades. But the mountains that bordered the valley were beautiful, towering peaks that scarred the sky. In contrast, Morotai Island was almost picturesque and, in another time and circumstance, could serve as a come-hither temptation for a south sea island travel brochure. Morotai's particular hell was that it was minimum five-hour flight to the nearest target.

The war in the South Pacific--the nature of that war--forced nearly all combat units to be itinerant; when they moved they moved great distances and island-hopped. We never really got settled in and used to a particular place. But we expected this and anticipated new places with alien names. Also, moving meant that the war was going well, that we were taking the war to the enemy as he retreated. We always knew that there was another name, another place, that was to become home for a while. What a marvelous trek it would be to be able to go back to some of these places just for the experience of once again being at, say, Gusap or Morotai. But one cannot put the genie back into the bottle; wishing will not make it happen. Perhaps the newest interesting item about the well-traveled 41st Fighter Squadron is the latest name and place that can be added to our epic story: Colorado Springs.

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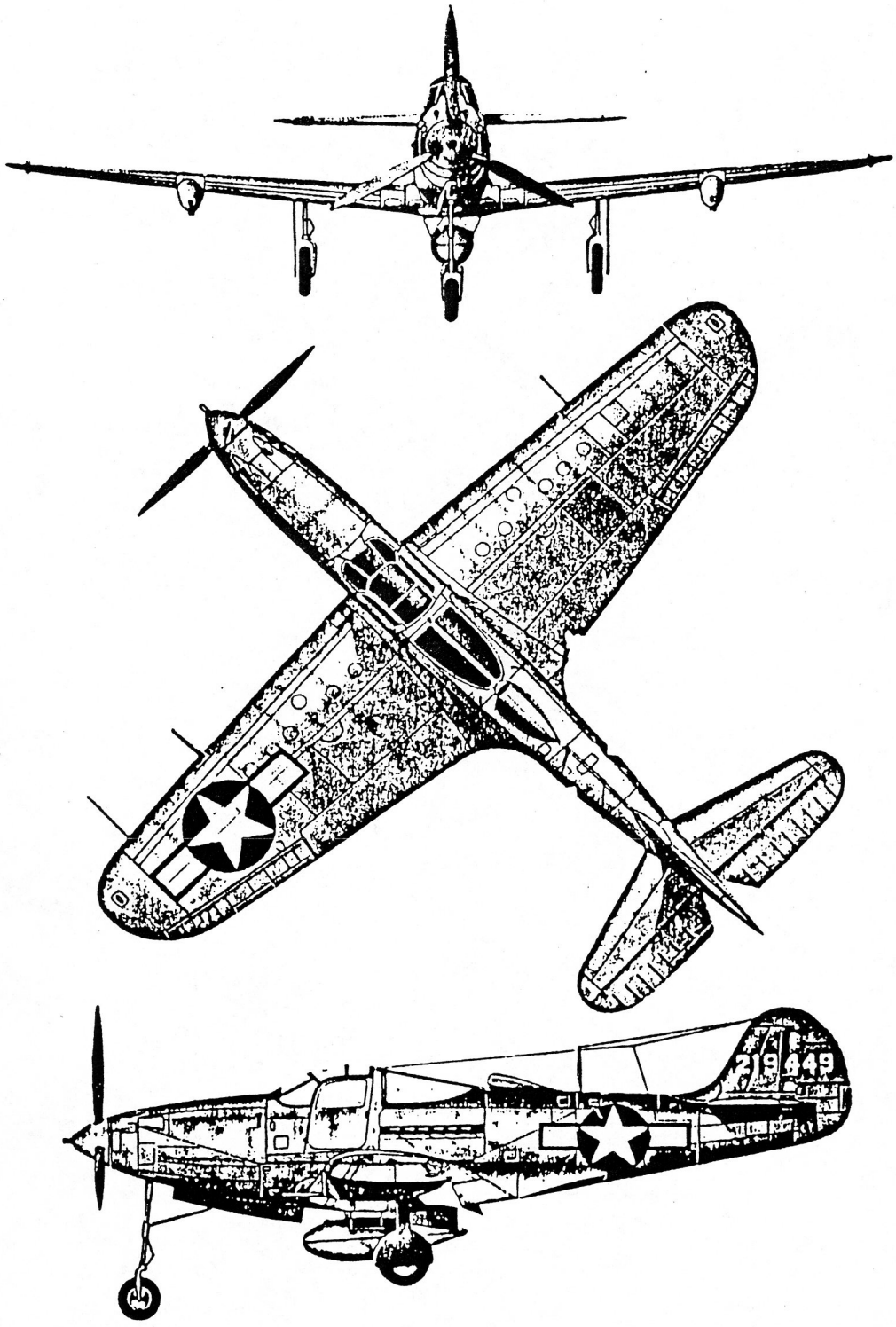


Lift-Off

The sun gradually ascends, and the veil of morning melts. Skies reach, mountains stretch, horizons challenge. Take-off time nears. You are in your plane, master of a mechanical marvel. You gather your thoughts, marshal your skills, begin your runway roll. The plane is a big and awkwardly-shaped mass; it can maneuver on the ground, but it is out of its element there. As it rolls ever faster, it seeks a kind of transformation--the caterpillar into the butterfly. Faster. Faster. You sense the plane taking on a new life. Full manifold pressure. Throttle firewalled. The propeller, unleashed, bites the air in screaming determination. The plane rocks slightly from the irregularities of the take-off surface. Your aviator's art keeps the plane straight as you steadily build speed, as runway markers flash by. And then, and then, the wings begin to take hold--you learn to feel it--the end of the ungainliness and the transition into the new element where the plane belongs. The plane lets you know that it is ready. Suddenly you experience that exhilaration which captures even the most jaded of pilots: that magical moment of lift-off, of becoming airborne. Explain it if you can; describe it if you can. Tell of the sudden stillness against the roar of the engine if you can. It is as though the plane is returning to the place from whence it came.

To an Aviator

You who have grown so intimate with stars
And know their silver dripping from your wings,
Swept with the breaking day across the sky,
Known kinship with each meteor that swings--

You who have touched the rainbow's fragile gold,
Carved lyric ways through dawn and dusk and rain
And soared to heights our hearts have only dreamed--
How can you walk earth's common ways again?

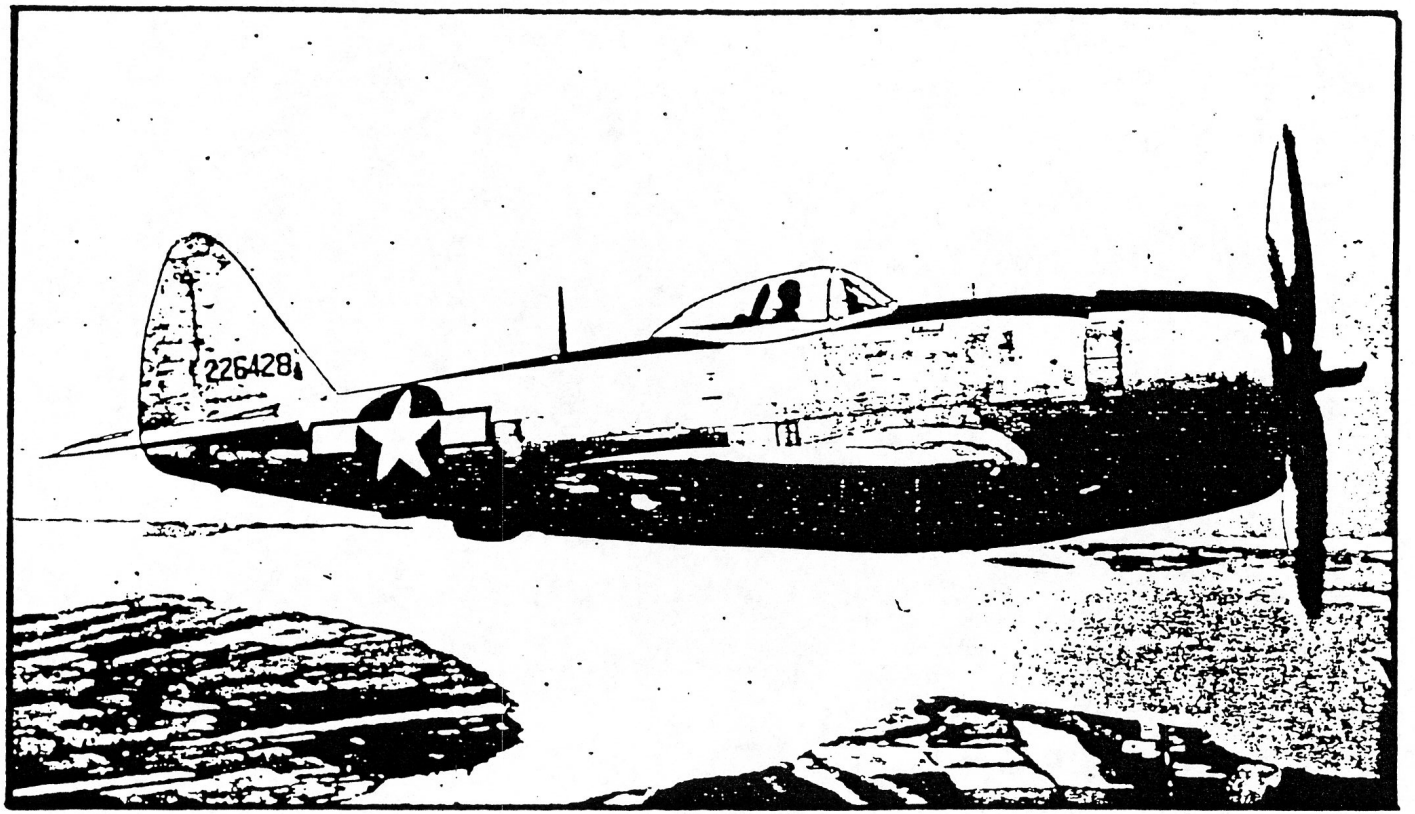
by Daniel W. Hickey

New in the Outfit

One memory that I haye always returns. The memory in itself is not specific; rather, it is a curious collection of things that becomes a single memory. Being a brand-new 41st'er was special--somebody put on a war and I finally got invited. Being new in an outfit--a fighter squadron in this case--always engenders certain feelings. The feelings, of course, would differ from person to person. The reticent person would react in ways unlike the extrovert. While I tend to be reticent, I still feel that I am of a gregarious bent, one who takes pains to "fit in."

Those first days in the outfit were filled with the mundane matters of getting settled, but I soon learned that the 41st was more than planes and missions. The 41st was people. What a revelation it was to be able, in those early days, to sit on the fringes of conversations so spirited, so serendipitous, so engrossing that I would become entranced. Today, and if I listen very closely, I can still hear Johnson and Dellinger and Dorethy and Alder and Fariello and all the "veterans" recount their experiences. To this day I still wonder if Tsili Tsili was an actual place or some sort of ShangriLa concocted by the "old hands" to pique the interest and psyches of the new guys. What was behind the magical, mystical tradition of "Smoko?" And what an effrontery it was that the powers-that-be should foist off on "us" those awful P-47s and relegate a pilot's dream, the beloved P-39, to the limbo of lost sweethearts. Clearly, it was a conspiracy. Such were the things that the new kids on the block listened to, and revelled in, and found important. These things, in concert with the stories of flying exploits, gave an aura of heroism to the old timers. At the same time, all of this built a sense of confidence toward those with experience: with these guys you would fly wing anyplace, anytime. They were pros!

(Time passed. Losses occurred. Way led to way. I became an old hand. Did I stir the new guy to some kind of esprit de corps as I had been?) Those days when I was "new" in the outfit were wonderful. And frightening. And inspiring. And those days gave me heroes.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A Phenomenon

The new propeller had just been installed, a replacement for the old one which had received damage from enemy ground fire on a mission flown the day before. Engineering had said to take the aircraft up for a test flight, even take it to altitude, and check it out for vibration and proper functioning in general. This should be a plum of a flight, a delightful departure from the recent routine of low level strafing missions. And the thought of altitude held allure.

In its entirety the flight was mechanically uneventful; the aircraft functioned perfectly in all of its phases as I put it through the conventional testing processes. All the while I was doing this I was gradually climbing, climbing along that invisible path which took me ever higher over the Philippine landscape and the shoreline vista of Lingayen Gulf. Going on oxygen at 10,000 feet, reaching toward the diaphanous cirrus formations at 20,000, I felt the exuberance of the conqueror. But this was not enough. Through thinning air, my Thunderbolt responded to my coaxing touches beyond 30,000 feet. On, on. Up, up. Finally, I called Fighter Control, "Angels thirty-five. How do you read me?" Following a "five by five" response, I took stock. South to Clark Field, north to Baguio and the highlands beyond, I looked at the world from aloft. These alien skies seemed friendly, yet ethereal and other-worldly.

Gazing from my celestial position to the seemingly endless distance of a perfect horizon created by the late afternoon haze, I was struck by a phenomenon that has remained with me to this day, an amazing cap to this perfect flight. Could it be? Was it real? Yes, it was there--visible evidence of the curvature of the earth! Others may quibble, doubt, and scoff, say it was impossible; but I know that I saw the curvature of the earth one day in 1945 over the Philippine island of Luzon.

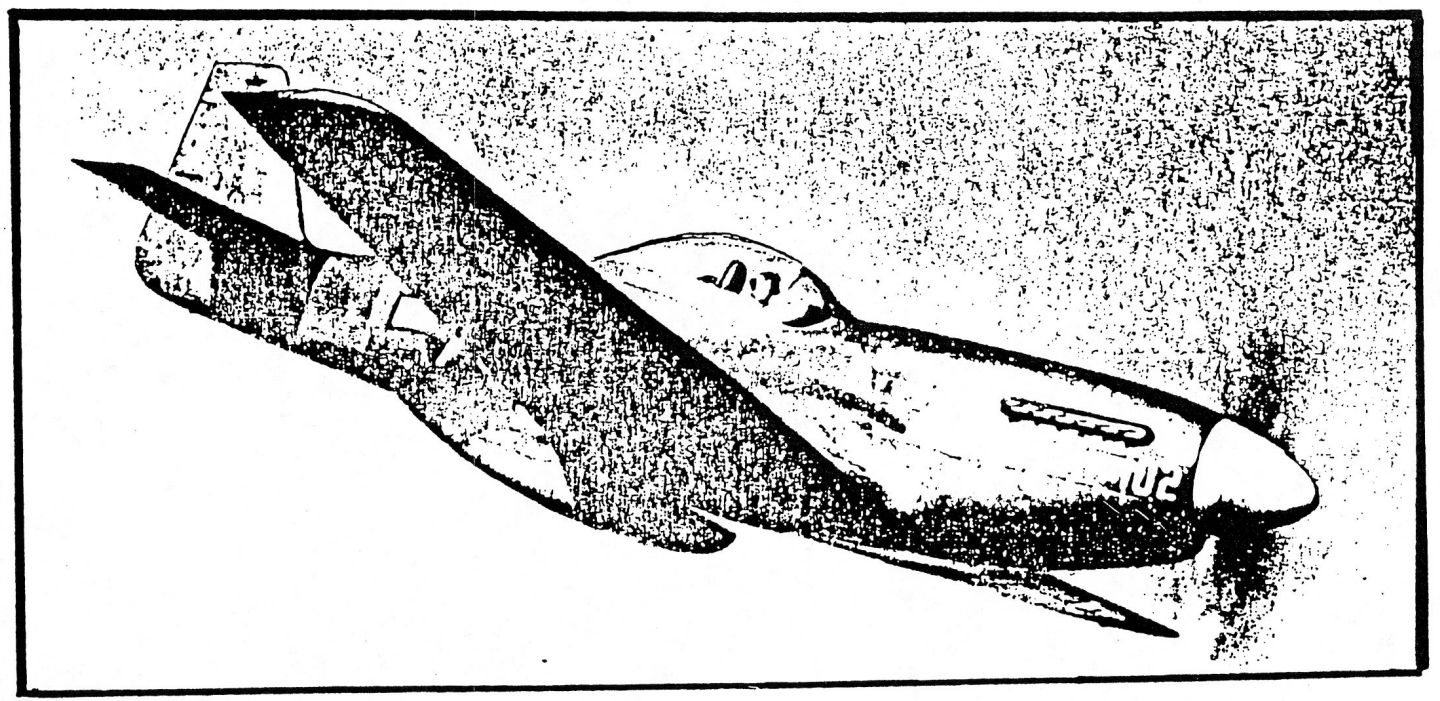
High Flight

Oh, I have slipped the surly bonds of earth
  And danced the skies on laughter-silvered wings;
Sunward I've climbed, and joined the tumbling mirth
  Of sun-split clouds — and done a hundred things
You have not dreamed of — wheeled and soared and swung
  High in the sunlit silence. Hov'ring there
I've chased the shouting wind along, and flung
  My eager craft through footless halls of air.

Up, up the long delirious, burning blue
  I've topped the wind-swept heights with easy grace
Where never lark, or even eagle flew —
And while with silent lifting mind I've trod
  The high untrespassed sanctity of space,
Put out my hand and touched the face of God.

John Gillespie Magee, Jr.
1922 – 1941

* Composed by Flight Lieutenant Magee while flying at an altitude of 30,000 feet. Shortly afterwards, the author, at the age of 19, was killed, serving with the R.C.A.F.



Looking Back

The Danish philosopher and theologian Kierkegaard wrote, "Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards." Little did Kierkegaard realize that he was explaining one of the truths that undergird reunions. There is no doubt in my mind that while indulging in the past, we receive insights as to the whys and wherefores of lives lived. More than once, while in the middle of a memory, I have had an abrupt realization that explained a circumstance of the past or that told me something of my youthful hubris.

The first time that I was ever in an airplane was when I took my first ride in a Fairchild PT-19. It was love at first flight. The apprehension that I had harbored through Pre-flight vanished. My mother could never understand my decision to become a pilot, but in looking back I can sense the depth of her maternal instincts. I think that she was a firm believer in the statement of the famed humorist Will Rogers: "If God had intended us to fly, He never would have given us railways." She was full of sage advice. When I was overseas, she wrote to me, "Never let them shoot at you." Well, things don't always work out. They did shoot at me. Most of the time they shot at me in terms of Winston Churchill's statement, "Nothing in life is so exhilarating as to be shot at without result." In trying to understand life, and war, by looking backwards, some truths emerge. As pilots who grew in experience, we also grew in competence and thereby lessened the levels of danger. Lady Luck did count some of us among her favorites. Most of us have never lost that ingrained feeling for machines that can take to the air. Teamwork in the air was a ballet. Friendship, that mysterious cement of the soul and sweetener of life and which was so strong among us on the ground, subtly worked its magic in the air letting us know that we "can do." Getting a "kill" was a moment of attainment that was genuinely shared by the total group.

"Life can only be understood backwards...." Kierkegaard was right.

The Flying

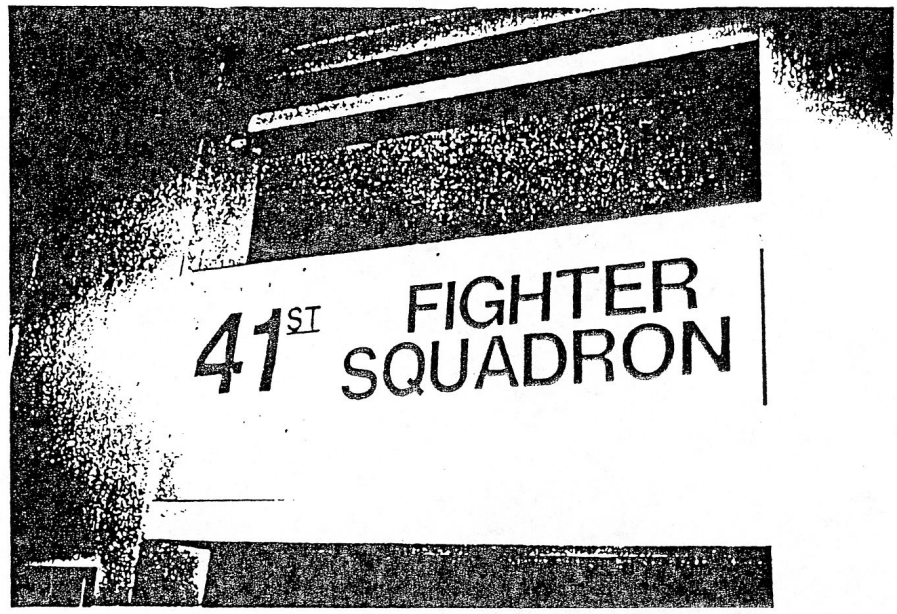
The flying. It always comes back to the flying. The stick in your right hand, the throttle in your left, the pedals under your feet. The plane soaring as you willed with the wings slicing through the ocean of air, the engine pulsing, the propeller pulling. So often, the flying seemed pure and clean and truly perfect. You were strapped in the cocoon that was your cockpit, clad in flying suit, mask, helmet and goggles, sometimes sucking the dry oxygen with its hint of rubber. Your seat was your parachute with accompanying survival gear. And you had a sense of euphoria derived from knowing the expanse of the skies and experiencing the subtle patterns of ever-changing clouds that only the airman can witness. In your mind, you can recapture the feeling of flying; it comes flooding back, and you are once again soaring through an infinite sky under an all-knowing sun. It is a memory that is hard to shake off.

The flying. It always comes back to the flying and the missions. The missions were why we were there. The missions were an exultation of purpose as we willingly flew into harm's way with attrition in our hearts. And we had moxey; we knew what we were about as we went against an implacable enemy. "Remember Pearl Harbor" was more than just a line from a popular tune or a rallying slogan. Rather, it was a very palpable phrase of subtle motivation that often manifested itself in acts of bravery and selflessness as we flew our missions.

The flying. It always comes back to the flying and why we were there. We were there because it was a thing of significance. Underneath it all, beyond the veneer of the "glamour" and the wearing of those silver wings, we were purposeful young men driven to do what we were trained to do and to fly for our country. Corny? Never! What higher calling could we have had?

The flying. It always comes back to the flying. For us, the flying was esthetic, and it was fighting the enemy, and it was purposeful beyond words.

1990
San Antonio



San Antonio, 1990

To the 41st'ers,

The "reactivation" of the 41st Fighter Squadron through reunions has prompted thoughts of old associations and actions of the war years to return to me in unexpected ways, and I recount a few of them to you in this small packet of writings. The many associations manifest themselves in renewed friendships and in bringing each other up to date about our lives; the actions, well, flying was the main action, and that was probably the most fun you could ever have with your clothes on.

Since the "Springs," the early forties have been returning to my thinking in incessant ways. Thoughts enter my mind, and there is nothing I can do about them until I set them down on paper. So I have recorded a few more thoughts and am foisting them off on you and trust that you can enjoy the reading of them and maybe even share a vicarious experience. I guess that the foregoing is slight proof of the old adage that youth is the time for adventures of the body, but age is for the triumphs of the mind.

Allow me to share with you, then, a half dozen musings dealing with the 41st and my time overseas. I suppose that I have, without realizing it, attempted to establish some kind of a voice--the literary voice of an ex-fighter pilot proud of his squadron association, of one who desires to keep memories alive in the hearts and minds of his fellows. Perhaps I have illumined our present lives with beams of reflective views into the past, our mutual past.

Blue skies,

Dick DeBaugh

Memorial Day, 1989

The 41st Fighter Squadron reunion was the thing that did it. After forty-five years, the reunion was the reason, the reason that Memorial Day once again became important.

Those few days at the "Springs" did it--the renewing of old friendships, the re-establishing of the old bonds, the returning of that familiar bonhomie, the opening of the floodgates of the memory, the looking back. All of this happened, and "they" came back to us and filled our hearts. As we reuned, we reminisced; and the names were said again, said aloud. The names that were said were the names of old friends, fellow pilots who never made it back. Inestimable losses. Walcott, Wedemeyer, Jeanes, Scotty, and all the rest. The names were said again, heard again, reverentially. One could almost feel that they were standing over there at the edge of life raising their cups with us. Salud! All of them are still young, vibrant with youth, never to age with the rest of us. What a grand lot they were! They would not wish us to drift through life sensing themselves to be uncomfortable baggage in our thoughts. They would tell us "well done" and applaud us for the paths we have followed; they would say that remembering them is proper but to get on with the rest of our living.

Yes, Memorial Day, 1989, became special because of the 41st reunion. Walcott, Wedemeyer, Jeanes, Scotty, and all the rest of you, Memorial Day is once again important, renewed in its significance. And we will say your names again and again and again.

Being Assigned

You could tell. If you were a pilot, you could really tell. The C-54 greased into the Port Moresby strip during a gentle rinse of rain, and you knew that your pilot was a pro. In fact, the entire trip was a smooth one. It had been, I suppose, the normal trans-Pacific flight: Frisco, Hickam Field, Baker Island, Guadalcanal, and then into Moresby. Our C-54 was one of the very first into Moresby, which by March of 1944 was declared "safe" for 54's.

We were a planeload of replacement pilots, young paladins of a free society planning to bring sense to a chaotic world. While we were in awe of the ruggedness and pristine beauty of New Guinea, many of us wondered what was next. What would be our lot? What would be our assignment? As for me, a 1052 single engine fighter pilot, I would probably go to a fighter squadron where (ah, valor) defying death was a daily duty. Given life in the service, an assignment always seemed to be a random event--an event without order, pattern, or predictability; although "being assigned" did on occasion seem to be part of a pseudo-system based on the alphabet, the first letter of your last name. Whatever the method, my assignment was made; and I was on my way to Gusap and the 41st Fighter Squadron.

It was a stroke of grace. Once indoctrinated, once settled in, once accepted as a 41st'er, that squadron became my life and continues to this day to be a nourishing experience. Within the grandness and scope of the total mission of the Fifth Air Force the fliers of the 41st became an intimate group imbued with teamwork and the goal of victory. While the 41st became a microcosm within the "big picture," our loyalties were given to our own small combat unit much more strongly than to any grand ideological cause.

And so, the 41st has a strong purchase on my mind and soul and gives me a bias that is perhaps now more emotional than rational. My retrospective of myself, the early nineteen forties, and "being assigned" to the 41st Fighter Squadron is a moving one--moving to the degree that when I say the words "41st Fighter Squadron," I say them like a benediction.

On Sydney Harbor

The usual pursuits of 41st'ers on leave in Sydney were often Dionysian in spirit and nature; not that we indulged in any orgiastic frenzies, but we did direct our energies toward having a good time. We felt that we had it coming; a "good time" was, after all, the purpose of going on leave. Rest and recuperation meant redirecting our thinking away from all that was happening up north in the islands.

On one special day while on leave in Sydney, several of us redirected our hedonistic ways and gave a new slant to achieving a good time and diverting our outlook about the scruffiness of the war. There were five of us, and we rented a sailboat for a day to sail on Sydney Harbor. That day turned out to be a grand experience. I have the feeling that Doug Parsons engineered the entire day so I am indebted to him for this memory. Our sailboat for a day was probably a thirty-footer (a crew of one was included), and she was a sleek beauty and very yare and all that. To you landlubbers, "yare" means seaworthy, manageable, and responsive to the helm. I looked it up.

Being young men of foresight, we provisioned our sailboat with food and beer and set sail under gray skies and over choppy waters; Sydney Harbor was ours for the sailing. Those of us who were along for the ride soon gained confidence in those who were handling the boat. With the crewman, Parsons was using arcane terms such as <u>luff</u> and <u>tack</u> and <u>reach</u> and <u>come about</u> and other sailory-sounding stuff which made the rest of us feel assured and "just right." Of course, our beer supply was diminishing so we were beginning to feel "just right" anyway. Thankfully, Parsons was all business with the boat thing so there was no problem with the seamanship. But for the rest of us, it was a totally good time. One of my great memories of this magic outing was of Scotty. Picture him, with his irrepressible antic enthusiasm, standing on the bowsprit and hanging on to a rope and challenging the rough waters from his precarious perch. Scotty,

sopping wet and in complete happiness, won the challenge. And it was Scotty who led us in story telling and in song. Ah, what song! Our voices carried in the wind on Sydney Harbor. With the vast carelessness of children, we sang and sang:

Ashes to ashes and dust to dust,
If the Japs don't get you, malaria must.

That excerpt is not exactly an old sea chantey; but, despite its underlying somber note, we sang it, and other hits, in a riotous, raucous, bawdy, fun-loving mood which was dispelled only with the waning hours of the afternoon and a gorgeous red sunset against a clearing sky. The food and the beer were gone; day was done. We were tired, sated, and happy in our day's experiences and in our companionship.

It was a wonderful day, and I am glad that it is one of my memory capsules. Going sailing that day was one of the wiser choices that we made in a Sydney of many choices. Some great philosopher, perhaps Plato or Yogi Berra, once said that "Wisdom sails with wind and tide" (that is, the wise do not oppose the irresistible). That day, Doug Parsons and Scotty and the rest of us were wise in our choice to sail with the wind and tide and enjoy a spirited day on Sydney Harbor.

A Memorable Sight

Morotai Island. Early 1945. Just after midnight. It was a night following one of those draining eight-hour missions deep into the Philippines. Restless and sleepless, I arose from my cot in a simple intuitive move, a move that, when revisited in the mind, makes one grateful. Such was to be the case for me on this night, for I was to be granted a memorable sight. It was a sight that has indelibly remained with me to this day.

I stepped from my tent into the muggy tropical air that seemed to be trying to cool; for a moment I "listened" to the night and became aware of the island symphony of sounds under nature's baton. And then, typical of the aviator, I looked skyward to survey the weather. Overhead and to the north, all was clear. The grove of trees wherein we were encamped made shadowy patterns of delicate filigree on the ground in the light of a full moon. There was beauty there, but it was to be paled by what happened next. I turned, faced due south, and became transfixed.

Some distance to the south, rain was falling. In that night time instant, the conjunction of the moon and the rain clouds--and I as witness--produced one of nature's most beautiful moments: a lunar rainbow. I quickly moved to a vantage point where the trees seemed to part just for me. The rainbow was total, a complete well-defined arc of breathtaking color. And the pot of gold was mine simply for being there to gain the wealth of this memorable sight.

If I could convey the beauty of that time and place in some sort of chiseled prose or singing poetry, I would be giving something to my fellow man. For a lunar rainbow is a remarkable rarity. The great English romanticist William Wordsworth wrote:

> My heart leaps up when I behold
> A rainbow in the sky. . .

Morotai Island. Early 1945. Just after midnight. A lunar rainbow. My heart leapt up.

Joe

Since the "Springs" reunion, the 41st of the early 1940's has risen in a dream of images, cadences of a past episode given new life, new meaning. One part of that episode has always remained with me to disturb and waylay my reminiscent mind. Remember Joe Wedemeyer? Well, listen.

I liked Joe. He was a cerebral kind of guy with a quiet sense of humor; he always seemed to be wrestling with the idea of a smile. His Jewish faith gave him strength and solidity in dealing with his military lot and, probably, life in general. Joe and I had some felicitous conversations, and I always left him feeling upbeat. Joe was easy to like, and he was a good pilot. If this sounds somewhat elegaic, well so be it and amen. The 41st lost Joe. He was shot down on one of those missions to Balikpapan.

Joe's loss, like all of our losses, was hard to take. For some reason, and through a distillation of thoughts, it was a loss that developed within me a desire for revenge. Call it a matter of reducing oneself in stature if you must, but I had a strong feeling to gain revenge for the sacrifice of Joe. "Sacrifice." The word holds no splendor; it is only another word for death. Revenge is a terrible thing for one to hold within, for it is the mainspring that forces one to act and think viciously. But I was saddled with desire for revenge, and the ultimate act of my revenge was to kill, to "get even."

Revenge can be frustrating, like trying to find a stick with only one end. Yet just a few weeks later my need to exact revenge was requited. It was over Tarakan Island, just off the northeast coast of Borneo. I remember that Scotty was leading the squadron that day, and Yellow Flight was in my charge. I had spotted a Jap plane in the air well below us; Scotty answered my call and gave us an OK to drop down to check it out. The upshot of the action was that Yellow Flight got two in the air and five on the ground that day. The terrible chemistries of war dormant inside of us on that day were unleashed as a Jap pilot-parachutist was ripped and shredded by barrages of fifty caliber bullets. Revenge was mine, but I did not think about it until later. Then I felt better about Joe.

Contact

Pilots of the 41st always acquitted themselves extremely well on combat missions. 41st airmen faced many dangers in the course of their flying duties; and when they returned from hazardous flights and were "debriefed," they were normally very matter-of-fact, even low key, as they narrated their experiences to S-2, Intelligence. In actuality, many of those combat experiences were harrowing for their danger. Combat aviation has been defined as hours and hours of boredom punctuated by an occasional moment of stark terror.

The terror was often the result of aircraft malfunctioning, but the retrospective view also suggests that terror was the result of enemy confrontation. Importantly, the terror--none of us would admit to such an emotion--was handled, managed, dealt with by us because we were well trained, dependent upon each other, and, yes, even valorous. In a word, the terror was "ignored." But there was a strangeness about actually meeting the enemy regardless of the form it took. Ernest Hemingway referred to it as "that ever-mysterious event called contact." Contact. Enemy engagement. Whether it was strafing, aerial combat, or dive bombing, we were doing battle with a harsh enemy. We were attempting to inflict harm, damage, and death upon him and he upon us. Do you remember, for example, dive bombing railroads in Formosa? It was like maneuvering downward through a maelstrom of fiery tracers. Do you recall an instance of aerial combat? Your aviator's art was called upon in the extreme as you engaged in the ultimate man-against-man test. Remember the strafing? The little bastards actually shot back at you.

Contact. "Ever-mysterious" contact. It was a significant part of our job, yet to define it with satisfaction is not easy. It was felt inwardly and dealt with outwardly. And so we flew. We lived and, sometimes sadly, died by our gift of being able to control an airplane with grace and rhythm as we made contact with the enemy.

Down Time

Memory is a clumsy thing as it strives to get its hands on snippets and fragments of the past. It brings back cameo appearances of people who were vital in our lives. It indulges with half-truths and selectiveness. It ineffectually lets us relive past moments. For these and other reasons, the day-by-day life in the 41st when we were not flying, the down time, is a life that is hard to recall. We often had time on our hands, yet the fault was our own if we became bored; boredom is a self-inflicted disease. In looking back, all of us were young men obligated to drop our own affairs and take up the burdens of the nation, subjecting ourselves to the mental and physical hazards which are peculiar to military service and which do not exist in normal civilian life. In other words, life was somewhat atypical. We simply had to use our down time in such ways as to help us cope, stay sane, keep quality in our existence, stay uplifted. "Let me count the ways," some of the ways, how we spent down time.

The 41st held many fine conversationalists. The subject matter of the bull sessions was far-ranging, but many of those sessions were busman's holiday things where one could hear aviation spoken in technical terms as well as in the gesticulating hands-in-the-air terms that brought theatrics to flying exploits. Another mainstay of 41st talk were the malespeak accounts of trysts, assignations, and encounters with the opposite sex. A noteworthy honest-to-God fact about this latter topic (the single guys were especially aware of this fact) was that the married men among us gave so much evidence of loyalty, love, and respect toward their wives. Yes, the talk was far-ranging: sports, home, politics, jobs, schooling, post-service expectations--anything and everything was covered in language that was clear, terse, and often quaint for its colorful usage. 41st'er were a loquacious lot.

All of us were writers in degree. We probably should have

written home more often, but we did write letters. There were many indications in our return mail that our letters to our homes and families were treasured just as we treasured the mail that we received. Received mail was vitalizing for us and was anticipated; it truly brightened our days. One genre of writing that all of us should have attempted, but very few did, was the diary. So much of our lives during an arresting time of life has been forgotten, little things and important things that have vanished or have become as nebulous as the air in which we flew. Diary keeping, even simple writing, is a chore for many that is easy to put off; yet, "'Tis madness to defer." Diaries are the stuff that books are made of. True, diaries are not a strong literary tradition but to have kept one during those war years would have allowed us, over four decades later, the ability to zero in on the events and emotions that befell us.

There were days when our emotions told us that we were living on the cutting edge of life, well removed from any bungalow culture. We subscribed, it sometimes seemed, to the "Peanuts" comic strip line of thought, "I have a new philosophy. I'm only going to dread one day at a time." But we could not let ourselves remain in a funk. One thing we did, then, was to turn to card playing. In the main, we played four games: bridge, gin rummy, poker, and solitaire. Recollection suggests that we were avid in our card playing, that we labored in the helpless belief that the Answer to Life waited just for us in the next deal.

Many of the 41st'ers were "sack artists." That is to say, sleep came easy--in the morning, in the afternoon, in the evening, through meals, through good weather and bad. Of course, this resulted in some of us not being able to sleep at nights. It was an unresolved struggle as to whom would be named the night time Patron Saint of Insomniacs. Long nights were often devoted to those above-mentioned conversations when prevailing blackout conditions seemed to foster candor and the laying bare of souls.

"Of all the diversions of life, there is none so proper to

fill up its empty spaces as the reading of useful and entertaining authors." So wrote Joseph Addison in The Spectator in 1711. Our down time was replete with those "empty spaces" which we often filled with reading. Whether or not the authors we chose were "useful and entertaining" was another matter. Actually, we read what we had; and what we had was usually not of our own choosing. Packages from home often held reading material which was passed from tent to tent and hand to hand to the degree that even nonreaders became readers in order to give wings to the empty spaces of down time. Reading became a mainstay of our lives, perhaps because of its escapist potential; it helped us to enjoy life better or, at least, endure it better. Enduring life overseas seemed to be, for some, the operating principle; therefore, to read was to endure.

Our down time, then, was filled in sundry ways, many more than have been mentioned here. We used our down time as a respite from flying duties; and whether we were busy or did absolutely nothing, it became important to us, sustaining to us. We used it in personal ways and meaningful ways because none of us knew for certain just how much down time was due us. While we might have occasionally felt that we had cornered the market on lethargy, those non-flying days were upliftingly spent gaming at cards, sacking out, reading, writing letters, talking--all vital things in the effort to shorten the eternity of our down time.

Premonition

Memory can suffer with the passage of time, but some things are indelibly imprinted on the sensibilities, become immutable parts of our being. Roger Blaylock is a case in point. He and I were in a group of replacement pilots on our way to New Guinea. We had been together in a Replacement Training Unit (RTU) in Perry, Florida, and had become good friends--same barracks, same flight group, same schedule. We were on a C-54 somewhere between Hawaii and Baker Island. Among the midnight sprawl of pilots in the cavernous reaches of the transport, Blaylock and I were talking mutedly. It was a rambling conversation but in context he said, "You know, this is a one-way trip for me. I'll never make it back." The thing about it, he was right.

Blaylock was unusual. He was from Iowa, a graduate of Drake University. Unemcumbered by attitude, he never knew a stranger; his "likeability" was immediate so it was easy, perhaps normal, for him to be at the center of things. He was so well read, so intelligent, so affable, so charming that he made you feel as though you had undergone a charisma bypass. He was insatiable in his quest for the humor and fun in life and had a keen eye for life's lunatic moments as well as being a natural at giving you a kick in the intellect. He could move in any circle as he was never ill at ease and possessed a verbal fluency with any kind of person. To repeat, he was from Iowa, and the paradox of Blaylock was that he was the complete cornfield cosmopolite. And he was my firm friend. We were offered the chance to become RTU instructors at Perry but turned it down. In his insouciance, Blaylock thought instructing beneath him. He would rather wench around in merry old England.

But Dame Fortune had him go to the Pacific with me. Perhaps he felt he had lost control of his life for the first time, had had his vision erased. Hence maybe, just maybe, he was prompted to voice his premonition about that one-way trip. Yes, he was right. Blaylock went to the 40th Squadron and was lost in weather out of Morotai.

Ready or Not

Strange. I wonder how many others had felt the way I did. New in the squadron. In the combat zone. Green as grass. In the 41st just a few days, one orientation hop, and I was assigned to fly a combat mission. A combat mission for God's sake! What in hell did I know about flying combat? My 120 hours in a P-47 struck me as being totally inadequate. Instead of 120 hours, I should have had 1200 hours. Then maybe, just maybe, I might have had that sense of plane mastery whereby I could acquit myself with a kind of respectable flying performance that would not bring me shame or endanger my fellow fliers.

As it turned out, that first mission was little more than a flying school exercise, a very non-threatening five-hour mission from Gusap to Wewak flying wing for Pappy Farrar. At least, that part was comforting. Pappy was one of the "Old Guys."

Our mission was to strafe Wewak. Wewak! The damn place was a disaster already. Never mind. Strafe Wewak. We approached our target from the ocean side. In my imagining, I just knew that we would face heavy anti-aircraft action, see Japs high-tailing it for cover, encounter swarms of defending Zeros. My God! My first real mission! I was in over my head! Why, oh why didn't I take that instructing job back in Perry, Florida? I didn't need this in my life; but then I had a case of the piles, and I didn't need that either. Why did I always find out about those "generous" sophomore girls when it was too late? The verities of life galloped through my mind as I clung to Pappy and followed him into HELL. HELL? Wewak was little more than a murkily undefined patch of Jap crap, a junk pile of twisted metal and buildings of kindling, gouged and cratered landing strips.

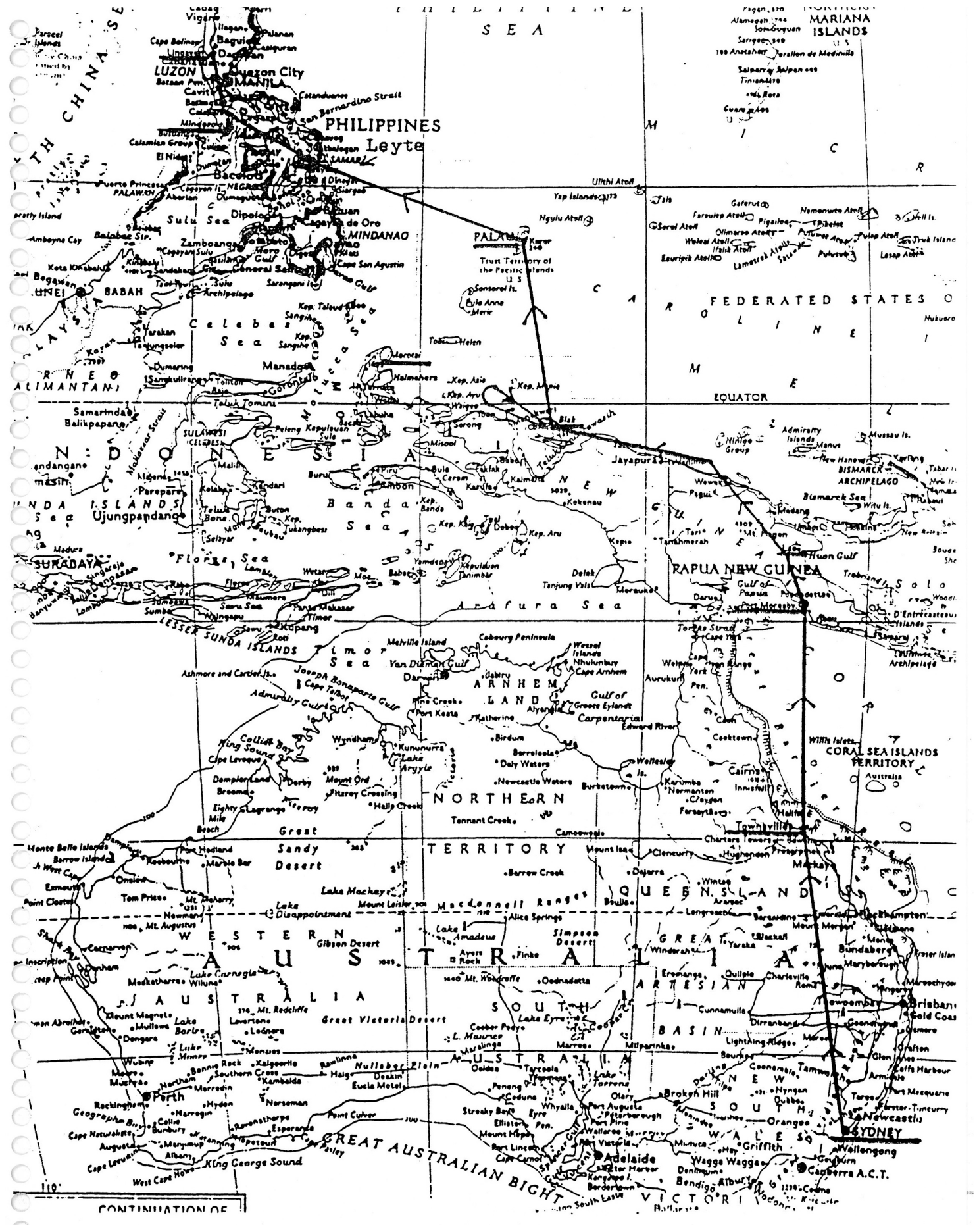
What could I do but empty my fifties into this now harmless vestige of Jap military might? I flew not in anger or in relief as much as in disappointment--disappointment that my first mission was such a milk run. Even so, it was an experience that I could look back upon and with a degree of bravado say, "125 hours is better than 120."

Goin' Home

I had spent a glorious fortnight in Sydney. After that much time in this siren city, after dealing with the squadron black marketeer, after frequent testing of the local beer, after heady efforts at trying to romance Aussie bimbos in the local bistros, after all of this I was ready for some much needed R and R back with the squadron where the pace of life, as compared with life in Sydney, was serene. My leave was at an end; I was about to begin an odyssey. I was about to add to the legendry of the transient aviator returning to his outfit. The transient aviator--a forlorn figure exhausted from his Sydney escapades and trying to do the right thing by quickly returning to his base, by goin' home. It became a trip that soon erased the memory of those halcyon days and nights spent in Sydney.

The trip became a blur of strange places, coldly unappealing operations tents, dreary flightlines, uncaring sergeants, irregular meals, indifferent flight crews, and much putrid weather. My ride out of Sydney was in some kind of Australian Air Force plane and was aviated by a bloody bloke who took pleasure in flying low and scaring hell out of his few passengers. We felt fortunate as we safely settled into a landing at Townsville--the first leg of my trip completed--and then, after a change of crew, continued on up to Port Moresby. The pilot on this leg took us to an altitude of twelve thousand feet where the cold became noticeably uncomfortable.

One might expect that Moresby would have been upgraded somewhat by this time (early 1945), but this was not the case. The airstrip facility was fine, but the "inn" amenities were still austere. After spending the night in the transient personnel hovel, my first task of the morning was to secure transportation and get on with my traveling. Luck was with me; even though I did not breakfast, I did find a flight, an early morning C-47 jaunt on a due north heading over the Owen Stanley Range to Lae. It was a beautiful flight with smooth air and


PHILIPPINES
LUZON
MANILA
Quezon City
Leyte
SAMAR
MINDANAO
Davao
Zamboanga
PALAU
Koror
Yap Islands
Ulithi Atoll
Ngulu Atoll
Truk
Namonuito Atoll
Pulusuk Atoll
Lamotrek Atoll
Satawal
Puluwat
Lukunor Atoll
Truk Islands
MARIANA ISLANDS
Saipan
Tinian
Rota
Guam
Agana
Anatahan
Farallon de Medinilla
Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands
U S
FEDERATED STATES O
M I C R O N E S I A
EQUATOR
Sulu Sea
Celebes Sea
Molucca Sea
BORNEO
KALIMANTAN
BRUNEI
SABAH
SARAWAK
INDONESIA
SULAWESI
CELEBES
Makassar Strait
Banda Sea
Flores Sea
Arafura Sea
Timor Sea
LESSER SUNDA ISLANDS
Ujungpandang
SURABAYA
Kupang
Dili
Ambon
Manado
Balikpapan
Samarinda
Jayapura
Hollandia
Biak
Sorong
Manokwari
Merauke
Kokenau
Kaimana
Tanahmerah
Mt. Trigon
Mt. Hagen
Wewak
Madang
Lae
Salamaua
Finschhafen
Huon Gulf
Gulf of Papua
Port Moresby
PAPUA NEW GUINEA
NEW GUINEA
Admiralty Islands
Manus
Nuguria Group
Mussau Is.
BISMARCK ARCHIPELAGO
New Hanover
New Ireland
Kavieng
Tabar Is.
Bismarck Sea
Witu Is.
Rabaul
Buka
Bougainville
Solomon Islands
D'Entrecasteaux Islands
Woodlark Islands
Trobriand Is.
Tagula
Misima
Rossel Island
Louisiade Archipelago
Torres Strait
Cape York
Weipa
Aurukun
Pen.
Coen
Cooktown
Edward River
Gulf of Carpentaria
Groote Eylandt
Van Diemen Gulf
Melville Island
Cobourg Peninsula
Wessel Islands
Nhulunbuy
Cape Arnhem
Darwin
Ubirr
ARNHEM LAND
Pine Creek
Port Keats
Katherine
Ashmore and Cartier Is.
Joseph Bonaparte Gulf
Cape Talbot
Admiralty Gulf
Collier Bay
King Sound
Cape Leveque
Wyndham
Kununurra
Lake Argyle
Victoria
Birdum
Barrelesloe
Daly Waters
Newcastle Waters
Wattiesley Is.
Burketown
Karumba
Normanton
Croydon
Forsayth
Cairns
Innisfail
Mitchell
Atherton
Halifax
Townsville
Charters Towers
Hughenden
Prosperine
Mackay
Clermont
Mount Isa
Camooweal
Tennant Creek
Hells Creek
Eighty Mile Beach
Lagrange
Derby
Broome
Dampier Land
Mount Ord
Harvey Crossing
Leopold Ranges
NORTHERN TERRITORY
Great Sandy Desert
Monte Bello Islands
Barrow Island
Port Hedland
Roebourne
Marble Bar
Onslow
Exmouth
Point Cloates
Tom Price
Mt. Meharry
Mt. Augustus
Lake Disappointment
Lake Mackay
Barrow Creek
Macdonnell Ranges
Alice Springs
Mount Leichhardt
Boulia
Winton
Longreach
Barcaldine
Emerald
Rockhampton
Mount Morgan
Gladstone
QUEENSLAND
Blackall
Yaraka
Windorah
Simpson Desert
Lake Amadeus
Ayers Rock
Finke
Gibson Desert
WESTERN AUSTRALIA
Carnarvon
Geraldton
Inscription
Lake Carnegie
Meekatharra
Wiluna
Mt. Redcliffe
Mt. Magnet
Mullewa
Lake Barlee
Leonora
Laverton
Great Victoria Desert
Ayers Rock
Mt. Woodroffe
Oodnadatta
Ernabella
Quilpie
Charleville
Roma
Dirranbandi
Goondiwindi
Toowoomba
Brisbane
Gold Coast
Maryborough
Bundaberg
Fraser Island
Gympie
Nambour
Caloundra
Noosa
Gin Gin
Childers
Bundaberg
Lake Eyre
Cooper Creek
Cunnamulla
Lightning Ridge
Moree
Glen Innes
Grafton
Coffs Harbour
Armidale
Tamworth
Narrabri
Walgett
Dubbo
Nyngan
Cobar
Broken Hill
Wilcannia
Menindee
Tibooburra
Wentworth
Mildura
Swan Hill
Deniliquin
Albury
Wodonga
Cooma
Canberra A.C.T.
Goulburn
Wagga Wagga
Griffith
Hay
Narrandera
Leeton
Young
Orange
Bathurst
Lithgow
Katoomba
Wollongong
Nowra
Batemans Bay
Moruya
Bega
Eden
SYDNEY
Newcastle
Port Macquarie
Taree
Forster-Tuncurry
Kempsey
Coffs Harbour
Grafton
Casino
Lismore
Murwillumbah
Tweed Heads
Byron Bay
Ballina
Kyogle
Inverell
Glen Innes
Tenterfield
Stanthorpe
Warwick
Toowoomba
Dalby
Chinchilla
Roma
Miles
Taroom
Injune
Mitchell
Augathella
Charleville
Cunnamulla
Eromanga
Quilpie
Thargomindah
Windorah
Birdsville
Bedourie
Boulia
Mount Isa
Cloncurry
Julia Creek
Richmond
Hughenden
Prosperine
Proserpine
Bowen
Collinsville
Home Hill
Ayr
Ingham
Townsville
Charters Towers
Mackay
Sarina
Rockhampton
Yeppoon
Gladstone
Biloela
Moura
Theodore
Taroom
Miles
Dalby
Toowoomba
Warwick
Stanthorpe
Tenterfield
Glen Innes
Inverell
Moree
Narrabri
Walgett
Coonamble
Gilgandra
Dubbo
Wellington

unlimited visibility. My hope was that this leg of goin' home was to be the harbinger of the remainder of my trek back to the 41st. But it was a false omen.

Leg four was to prove lengthy, frightening, and laden with difficult weather. My departure from Lae was during mid-morning aboard a C-46, the Curtis Commando; and, at the time, it seemed a propitious thing as our destination was Biak, a giant step in the return to my Morotai destination. A few minutes out of Lae deteriorating weather was encountered which forced a flight for the next few hours at an altitude of five hundred feet at the most. The old 41st bases at Nadzab, now little more than an Aussie encampment, and Gusap, deserted yet peopled with ghostly memories, were soon overflown. The pilot, seemingly very able, wisely guided his craft along the visible ribbon of the Ramu River. The weather remained uncompromisingly bad; but we were airborne, well into the flight, and the pilot's judgment was that we continue. And so we did. Considering the very nastiness of the weather and the roughness of the ride, this leg of the trip was one to deromanticize the art of aviation. The northern coast of New Guinea was finally broken at Wewak; and the flight continued--rain, wind, and lightning plagued--until Biak was reached, an island haven and a respite from sustained and draining tenseness. Sleep came easily that night even though the Biak Hilton accommodations were less than sumptuous.

The morning of the next day brought weather that offered promise of improvement. Accordingly, I scrounged a ride on a C-47 that proclaimed its function in bold nose lettering as "The Workhorse." This plane and its crew, I learned, had flown together for three thousand hours, a confidence-building fact. And so we left for Morotai during what seemed to be a break in the weather. Thirty minutes later The Workhorse was faced with roiling, broiling, far-reaching clouds of a midnight color. The pilot, in a move that smacked of discretion, returned to Biak. Being "weathered in" for forty-eight hours at Biak was not one of the highlights of my life, but at least it was a haven against

the storm gods. Then came another day, another plane ride, another adventure, and disconcerting news.

The news was that the 41st had made another move; going to Morotai would have been fruitless because the squadron would have been settling in on the Philippine island of Luzon at Lingayen, now my new destination. Life has its twists and turns; one must thrust and parry; a guy must do all he can when he is bent on goin' home. Using the very best of supply sergeant moxie and manipulation, I went to places other than Biak's transient personnel shack in search of a way to the 41st. Open Sesame! A naval installation of diminishing size, located at Biak and fortuitously found, became the source of another plane ride. This time I was a passenger aboard a Lockheed patrol bomber; destination: Palau, nearly due north from Biak. The icing on this deal was that this Navy plane was scheduled to trans-ship on into Leyte. Finally, I would be reaching the Philippine Islands and setting foot on an island nation which I had previously seen only from the air. My unbridled elation over this good fortune soon became tempered at Palau and Pelileu islands. These were two Pacific Ocean dots of land where seven thousand Marines lost their lives. The military flotsam and jetsam in the shallows off these islands attested to the bitterness of the fighting. The scars of battle would be seen for years, scars that would be the monuments of remembrance for many brave young men.

Leyte, also battle scarred, was a bustling place offering a military mix of sights. The Palau to Leyte weather had been perfect with prospects of continued blue skies. Hitching a ride out of Leyte did not pose a problem as I was able to obtain transportation the next day on a B-25 which was bound for Mindoro, another step closer to Lingayen and the old Buzz Saw Gang. However, there were occasions during the B-25 ride when I had my doubts about arriving anyplace alive! Those B-25 drivers must have been frustrated fighter pilots. When we reached the inland seas in this part of the Philippines, these guys kept the plane on the deck making tracks on the surface of the water with their prop wash; the twenty-foot red light was on, it seemed, for most

of the trip. But Mindoro was eventually reached; and we landed on the strip at a place called Calapan, a dusty, dirty, wind-blown place. I felt the same, buffetted and sundered by a trip too long. But undaunted and unbowed, I knew that the end of my forty-five hundred mile odyssey was in sight; I sensed the elation that accompanies victory over tribulation. Next, the trick was to overcome the final hurdle of reaching my very own El Dorado and once again enjoying the golden comfort of being among my friends of the 41st.

Calapan was the home of a B-25 group. B-25s were everywhere; they appeared to be scattered rather than parked. And, of course, the ubiquitous C-47s were present as always. Among the aircraft, I noticed one that was different, an A-20. Rugged looking. So much for aircraft identification. I headed for the strip operations center, entered, and had Lady Luck smile at me, a compassionate smile. As I waited my turn to talk to an operations officer, I overheard a pilot in front of me ask about the weather in store for a trip on up to Lingayen. Hearing that the weather was becoming threatening to the north, I questioned the pilot about Lingayen. It developed that he was the pilot of the A-20 and was stationed at Lingayen! He also said that there was a P-47 outfit based at the same strip. It had to be the 41st. It had to be home. The A-20 pilot was leary about giving me a ride even though he could squeeze me aboard, but I just happened to have the right item to pay for my fare. Rummaging through my bedraggled B-4 bag, I found a bottle of scotch. It was just enough to cover the cost of a "ticket" for final leg number nine to Lingayen, and I smiled back at Lady Luck. Goin' home had been arduous, but the vicissitudes of the trip were soon filed away in the recesses of my mind only to be dredged up and given light forty-five years later.

(Once I was a traveller in far lands and climes. Now, I assume the right to embellish adventure while I adhere to the thread of that adventure. Out of deference, you may applaud; out of skepticism, you may doubt. Or, you may simply smile as you recall that you, too, have a story that adds to the legendry of journeys to Sydney or of journeys goin' home.)

An Ultimate Irony

"The world is so safe, the Japs are selling Toyotas in Detroit and have decided to buy Hawaii, L.A. and N.Y.C." Such was the sentiment on the thoughtful '89 Christmas card sent out by Mugs. It is a sentiment the gist of which has been echoed by many ex-servicemen, several members of Congress, the business world, and the media. Despite the decrying of the Jap inroads into the American scene, these "octopus-like" inroads are becoming more extensive every day if we are to believe what we hear and read on an almost daily basis. Perhaps the truth of the matter is that the Japanese are good learners and have become better at capitalism than Americans. Now, that may be a highly simplistic way to look at it, but it is a nutshell explanation.

Nutshells aside, the decrying may be little more than lip service, and the whole trend of Jap ownership of America does seem to be extremely contrary to the anti-Jap mind-set that was so universal in our country after Pearl Harbor. The Jap ownership of America, if it continues, would seem to carry inscrutability to sublime levels. Assuming Mugs to be representative, 41st'ers have every right to look back and wonder. Remember? We put our lives on the line, we were uprooted, we were on "hold" for three, four, even five years in order to keep the U.S.A. the U.S.A. Undoubtedly, all of us, in our own ways, have indulged in self-reflection over this dilemma. Self-reflection, of course, is when one puts a slice of his life under a figurative microscope, focuses it in, and observes it carefully.

My observation has revealed nothing to debase my 41st experience of WW II. I admit to the existence of an ultimate irony wherein my one-time enemy is now a kind of growing partner in the great American saga. Nevertheless, what we 41st'ers did in those war years was stern stuff undergirded as it was by tireless work, high purpose, patent patriotism, and a driving determination never to let down our fellow pilots. Mugs, thanks for the Christmas card.

41ST Fighter Squadron

Reunion 1991
Reno

ROLL CALL

41ST FIGHTER SQUADRON

RENO, NEVADA

APRIL 24 - 28, 1991

Bob Alder
Dick Ankney
Walter Baker
Ross Beamer
Harlie Bearden
Bob Brewer
Keith Brown
Vern Brown
Harry Caughren
Jim Colley
John Conyers
Tommy Cook
Bob Cunningham
Alexander Curie
Tommy Davis
Dick DeBaugh
Homer Dellinger
Frank Fariello
John Farrar
Joe Fenlaw
Doug Finch
Nick Giordano
Ralph Good
Dick Goodale
Bob Gustavson
Harry Hecker
George Hilbert
Dena Huitt
Howard Hulford
Royal Kay
Erick Kyro
Gus Lundberg
Jim Mugavero
John Noel
Kenneth Nuzum
Olaf Omenson
Roy Owen
Ted Park
Doug Parsons
Cecil Peck
Charles Peterson
Frank Riedle
Lloyd Rosser
Bob Rouse
Milt Rowell
John Saunders
Travis Smith
Garet Soules
Jack Sunstone
Bob Tremelling
George Wagner
Jamie Wallace
John Wallace
Ed Widger
Norman Willey
Sam Yorty
Marshall Younkman

Reno Reunion, April 1991
41st Fighter Squadron

To My 41st Friends,

At a first look, reunions would seem to be the nice invention of one who is possessed with 20-20 hindsight. I certainly do not have that kind of rear view vision, but I do have these odd flashes of the past which have led to another packet of musings. The past, in part, perhaps the main part, is what reunions are all about. The past does not exist until we summon it up; and when we do summon the past, we certify it. With these writings, then, I have attempted, I suppose, to certify and attest to the past and that our mutual past was an amazing time in our lives. Now that we have reunions, perhaps we have established an institutional memory of the 41st Fighter Squadron.

This packet contains a mixture of thoughts: nothing profound, a little whimsey, some snippets of recall, a dash of exaltation of the 41st, backward glances. I offer them to you in the sincere wish that you find them readable. Even re-readable.

There is an exception included in this packet. During the past winter I re-read Ted Park's Nanette, and it reaffirmed my sense of his writing craft mastery. My re-reading (actually the third) eventuated in a critique--a short book review--of Ted's book from a 41st bias. So I have included that in this packet. Other inclusions contain the names of 41st members, and I hope that I used those names with at least a trace of accuracy considering the fact that the memory can become mushy. I would hope that these writings are not a matter of living in the past, rather, that they are an appreciation of the past.

Our reunions still have a "newness" about them. As a seduction of the senses, each reunion has been different in character and pulse even though all of them have been postscripts to the squadron's overseas experience. These reunions have been successful in preserving the heritage of our squadron and strengthening the bonds between us. I, for one, am intensely proud to be a part of that heritage.

Dick Vo. Baugh

Cogs

Theater, Air Force, Wing, Group, Squadron, Flight--and then at the bottom of this funnel of hierarchy came the individual pilot. He was the ultimate cog in the air war machine. All of those 41st Fighter Squadron cogs that lost their lives were indeed special, and even from the distance of nearly fifty years we can still sense their presence.

(Gaffney and Noble)

The cogs left us in many ways, ways that were determined by the war gods. How they were lost doesn't really matter; they were lost. Rupert Brooke's poem "The Soldier" contains a line that explains why those cogs remain with us, "A pulse in the eternal mind." The pulse of their being still beats within us.

(Scotty and Jeanes)

Every time a 41st cog was lost, life lost a pinch of pepper. A dynamic of breath was taken from us, and with a fine fluency we resorted to the blasphemous and the profane to subdue grief and the sense of loss. But they were not subdued. Instead, we simply lived with grief, assuaging it with time's mantle.

(Walcott and Wedemeyer)

Those cogs flew with us to many places, to where storms were born, to where eagles soared, to fear's precipice, to the halls of heroism. And then, then they took the ultimate flight. In Henry V Shakespeare wrote, "We few, we happy few, we band of brothers: for he that sheds his blood with me shall forever be my brother." Yes, they are still with us--somehow, some way--as our brothers.

(Sweeney and Warner and all the rest)

The Individual Pilot, Flight, Squadron, Group, Wing, Air Force, Theater; the hierarchy reversed, the funnel reversed. Because of all those cogs, the tonic of victory was ours even though soured by the loss of our fellow fliers. The cost was terrible.

(Gaffney, Noble, Scotty, Jeanes, Walcott, Wedemeyer, Sweeney, Warner, and all the rest. Our brothers.)

Party Time!

Did you ever read about one of those high-falutin swellegant parties in legendary places like the Grand Ballroom of the Waldorf Astoria and wish that just once you were among the elite in attendance? Save your envy. As a 41st'er, you had a ticket to some of the grandest, goddamnedest, most exclusive parties ever held. A 41st Fighter Squadron party was not just a fete or a gala or a bash, it was a monument to hedonism, to profligacy, to Dionysus himself if not to Bacchus, God of the Grape. The inspirations and reasons behind the occasions of our parties could be anything: a promotion, a Dear John letter, a particularly successful mission, going on leave, whim or caprice. In other words, we did not really need a reason. At our parties, we redefined fun--considering the backdrop of the war--and surely God would have winked his eye at our revelry.

Our parties were vivid, audacious undertakings. They were even mystical, I like to think, as we paid homage to the night's centerpiece, a huge vat of jungle juice which had as its base a liberal offering of medicinal alcohol. That was for starters. Our party caterers, caring contributors to the concoction, gave of themselves with curious abandon as if they had saved something special for a party. After adding the mix, which was almost always grapefruit juice (I can remember one batch that contained grapefruit sections), varied contributions to the vat were made with appropriate incantations suggestive of some sort of voodoo sorcery. Candies, perhaps a pinch of cocoa, a trace of sugar, maybe a touch of someone's hoarded private stock--for bouquet, of course--all might be added. The end result was always perfection on the palate, heady but not pretentious, unassuming yet assertive, refined yet earthy.

Each party had the potential of a prodigious drinking bout. Some were, Some weren't. All of them probably transformed our outlook toward the world into humane acceptability, and they made for good times. We would tire ourselves with drink, song, talk,

and general socializing. That jungle juice, a kind of old-pop-skull, seemed to have a power that would cause us to see incendiary colors outside the spectrum. Perhaps our parties were a part of the seize-the-day message which had a kind of currency during those war days overseas, a carpe diem kind of thought which prompted the need for an occasional letting-off of steam. Because the war consumed us most of the time, a party was simply a proper counterpoint to steady our perspectives.

How I wish that I might have been able to tape record one of those festive events. Imagine. Quaff-loosened tongues, lost inhibitions, service vocabulary kicked in, bull shit deepened, missions reflown, Sidney revisited, racy jokes told, silliness rampant. And the singing; God, it was positively operatic. Some of those wild limericks set to song are still with me. Service life and singing seemed inseparable. Cadet days and singing were certainly inseparable. To this day I cringe when I hear "I've Got Six Pence ...." Preflight, Primary, Basic, Advanced, all filled with song. I can remember Basic vividly from the following incident. New on the base, we were marching to something or from something; a chicken Second Lieutenant Tac Officer yelled at us to sing a song. So we sang:

> The second lieutenants are at it again, parlez vous,
> The second lieutenants are at it again, parlez vous,
> The second lieutenants are at it again,
> They're winning the war with a fountain pen,
> Hinky dinky parlez vous.

Well, this gold bar Tac Officer loved it. He made us sing it every time we came near him. But he must have tired of it because one day he yelled--never just spoke, always yelled--at us to sing another song about lieutenants. We were prepared and so favored him thusly:

> Proclaim the truth with flying pennants
> And nail them to your mental storehouse,
> The thing of rank among lieutenants
> Is rare as virtue in a whorehouse.

HALT! We were a squadron of cadets in a brace.

But I digress. Indeed, a tape recording would have preserved many quaint ballads, songs that could bring a tear to the eye and

a sniffle to the nose. Vocal quality was overlooked, but volume was de regueur. And the emotion! Heart and soul went into our singing. And into our drinking. And into the warmth of our companionship.

There is no doubt that many 41st'ers will recall some of those naughty limericks that we used to voice, but here is one that Scotty and Saunders and Murr (I think) would sing.

> On the chest of a barmaid in Sale
> Were tatooed the prices of ale,
> And on her behind
> For the sake of the blind
> Was the same information in Braille.

Solidly in our cups, we would continue on into the night singing and resinging old and overworked favorites, becoming braver and drunker, sensing our manhood, testosterone sluicing through our veins, until the jungle juice--thanks,Doc Fenlaw, thanks Doc Kay--was down to the last Life Saver. Then came the trudge, or stagger, back to our sacks. Drugged sleep usually came quickly.

This must be said: anyone who had a mission assignment for the following day bypassed the parties other than being a bemused spectator. A clear head was necessary if you were to fly; the interdependence and integrity of squadron flying were absolutes not to be endangered by a hangover. But there were hangovers, and many of the sufferers would have taken a curative bromo except that they could not stand the noise of the fizz, much less the trek to the flightline in quest of an oxygen tonic. For many, those mornings after when even the eyebrows ached were temporary and minor matters compared to the importance of a 41st Fighter Squadron party, a time when the mind could rid itself of the lunacy of the war. And our youthful resiliency would quickly bring us back to whatever might have been called normalcy.

Test Flight

The Form Five read, "Airplane broke." Or other notations might have been recorded: hard landing, oil leak, rough engine, bullet holes, a hundred different possibilities. So Thumper would take the plane off the ready list and have his men get the plane repaired so that it would be fit for flying once again. Occasionally, a plane would have to be tested for air worthiness and general functioning. A test flight was in order. One of the 41st pilots would be "invited" to take the plane up for a spin to check it out. A test flight became my lot a few times. I liked doing test flights.

A test flight was a different kind of flying. Gone was the combat flying mystique with its intensity of beauty and danger, mysteriously linked. Instead, the business of seeing how an airplane functioned was the purpose, and most of us were able to do this. After all, we were not test piloting a prototype plane; but we were testing a plane with which we were very familiar and, therefore, would have been alert to anomalies of operation.

Once, on Morotai, I had the opportunity to test a "Jug." I do not recall the specific reason for the test, but I do remember some of things about the flight. Once in the air, I determined that the plane was in "working order" and that it handled properly. Fighter Control, via radio, then gave me permission to fly the area. Dropping down to the deck, I circled the island. I already knew what the south part of the island looked like: the landing strips, the naval installation, Seabees, a semblance of trees plantation-planted, off-shore coral formations. The north side of Morotai, from the deck, was quite different. It had a Maine-like, rock-bound coast look, quite formidable with its heavy surf at work. A constant rumor in camp was that Japs were still on the northern half of the island but in disarray. Even so, a disquieting rumor. I looked for signs of the enemy, hoping that I would not see any and not really expecting to. The northern half of the island simply looked as though it had never been touched by man, as though God's calendar had become stuck at Day One.

Satisfied with my brief scan of the Morotai geography, I took advantage of an opportunity that was a plus about conducting a test flight; it was a time when you could test yourself about some of the basic verities of pilotage. Remember those old flying school excercises? You could do those things again--a steep-banked 360 degree turn and then leveling out at exactly the same altitude. Or flying a "square" at, say, 3000 feet and pulling out at each corner hitting the mark plumb on a cardinal compass heading: north, east, south, west, back to north still at 3000. These were some of the little yet big things about flying, seminal things you could do perfectly because you were a veteran, tricks of the trade by which you could smugly count yourself as a pro.

Next, you could attempt some aerobatics--twisting, turning, spiraling, diving, climbing. The exhilaration and excitement as you played with your stick, so to speak, could arouse you to a flush. Your test flight nearly at an end, you could revel in this kind of flying with its splendid isolation, this physical adventure that was also an adventure of the mind. The act of returning to the base and landing was both a literal and figurative coming down to earth. And as you knew it would be because Thumper would have seen to it, the plane was perfect; it had passed the flight test.

"Great flight, Thumper. Great plane. She's ready to go. In fact, I'd even fly her on tomorrow's mission."

Cuisine (?)

If you were to travel on the Concorde today, you could affluently lunch on foie gras, sole with truffles, and petit fours. Lunching aboard a Thunderbolt in the early nineteen forties on one of those eight-hour missions was truly a distant dining cousin compared to the Concorde of today. I cannot recall that our squadron mess ever prepared (concocted?) any kind of snack to take along on a mission to deter hunger and forestall fatigue.

However, we were resourceful young men; we soon learned to cope with hunger and fatigue in the air. There was nothing intellectual underlying this. Rather, it was an animal drive to do something about a basic matter: nurturing the body while on a mission. Many of our missions were physically draining. Flying west from Morotai over the Celebes Sea to the shores of Borneo or making our way north deep into the Philippines were taxing flights. We needed the fuel of food just as our planes needed their kind of fuel.

I can remember filling a flight suit pocket with edibles so that I might ward off hunger while aloft. My "menu" would vary from flight to flight: tropical chocolate, remindful of eating chocolate lard; cookies, from stateside and usually stale; fruit cake, hardened by time and barely edible; a peanut butter sandwich, filched from the mess tent and suggestive of brown glue; hard candy which was, well, hard candy.

So we had our "in-flight meals." Mindanao munchies, Cebu snacks, Borneo bites, Morotai morsels--we did what we had to do to sustain our energies, even to taking a shot of oxygen. It wasn't pheasant under glass or braised duck or lobster thermidor a la Concorde, but it was our way of trying to stay alert and ready, of being efficient pilots. And it brought truth to the old adage that no man can be a patriot on an empty stomach.

Cat

Slow. Lumbering. Ungainly. Clumsy. Inelegant. Awkward. Such were the words used to describe her. But, God, she was beautiful. Remember her? The PBY Catalina flying boat? I can still see her tooling along at about ninety miles an hour just off Tawi Tawi in the southernmost regions of the Sulu Archipelago or near Madang off the northeast coast of Papuan New Guinea. She was truly beautiful with her gutsy pilots and crews. Today, I can't recall that any of the Buzz Saw Gang ever had to use the services of a Catalina--she was lovingly known as Dumbo--in the train of our missions, but knowing of her presence was indeed comforting.

To look at a Cat and then realize exactly the purpose of so many of her missions would be enough to make you give thanks that you were in fighters. If anything, she appeared to be a doom-burdened airplane without much of a chance; yet when you were on a flight far from friendly shores and you were in radio touch with a Cat, she was like a letter from home: warm and reassuring, something to rely on in a mad world, a haven just in case you needed it.

Some of those Cat missions must have been dicey affairs. I can remember one that called for a 41st cover flight of four ships (then to be relieved by a second flight) to a small island off the coast of North Borneo to guard a Cat that was to land, taxi into a cove, and pick up a coast watcher, a Dutchman, they said, who had been radio reporting as to Jap coastal shipping and other possible maritime movement to and from the Makassar Straits. Intelligence believed that the coast watcher's position was precarious; The Cat's mission was to extract him. With what seemed to be total nonchalance and unconcern, the Cat made its way into the cove, sat there for the hour that my flight covered him, and finally left under the protection of the relief flight with mission accomplished. And this was a time when the Jap threat in that area was serious. While I am certain that the Cat crew appreciated the

cover of the 41st planes and felt safe because of that cover, their mission was nevertheless one of danger and risk.

Stories abound about Catalina flying boats and their feats of recovering downed pilots and air crews. Scattered among their many routine flights were occasional acts of derring-do and valor that brought them merited honor. Indeed, they appeared to be sitting ducks as they mosey^ed along their vectors or lazily circled a rendezvous point, but their job was vital to the full air force mission in the South Pacific.

The Cat--Dumbo--left many legacies; but one legacy is the memory of a slow, lumbering, ungainly airplane that was beautiful beyond words. And the simple fact that you knew she was out there someplace gave you a kind of comfort and confidence that enabled you to do your own flying job more effectively. It was as though Dumbo gave you another arrow in your quiver.

Crew Chief

Technical Sergeant Shepherd. When I had an airplane assigned to me, Shep came with it as Crew Chief. We already knew each other, of course, as a result of general flightline activity; but when both of our names were stenciled on the side of Number 172, our relationship took on a new dimension. Shep quickly assumed a mother hen attitude toward me and a very proprietary attitude toward the plane. It was as though No. 172 was signed out to him personally, and he just let me use the thing whenever my name happened to come up for flight duty. Shep was careful about his airplane, and I liked the way he took care of it because his good care gave me confidence. Not once did I abort a mission with the reliable No. 172.

Because the reliable No. 172 gave us common ground, Shep and I became friends within the normal military constraints. 172 was "his" plane and I was "his" pilot as was evidenced by his concern about me and the way he plied me with questions about how the missions turned out. When I shot down my Nip, Shep was just as elated as I was; he would not rest until he had all of the details, and I could only bask in the largesse of his approval.

That approval was constant as mission piled on mission, and Shep became an oasis of joy as we, a team, tried to do our parts as cogs in the 41st machine. As I was preparing to take 172 out on a mission, Shep was there on the wing double-checking that I, his pilot, was doing things right, doing things the "Shep way." After having pulled into the revetment at the conclusion of a mission, Shep was there again on the wing. First, he would ask about the plane, then he would ask about me. Time after time it happened. Shep on the wing, I in the cockpit--perhaps both of us were thrust into the relative comfort of ritual. I like to think that we co-existed in a successful symbiosis, he as crew chief and I as pilot.

With unabashed pride, I submit that perhaps Shep and I epitomized what Thumper Huitt wrote in an April 27, 1990, letter to me: "It was the team effort of the ground crews and pilots working and sharing together that made the 41st the number one squadron of the 35th."

". . . back when it was rough, really rough . . ."

All of the men of the 41st are special, but that speciality rises a notch when you hear the stories of the Old Guys of the outfit. Listen to what they have to say, draw them out, and a picture emerges of what it was like in 1943 and early 1944. Get Brown or Colley or Kyro or Park or Little Wag or any of those who experienced Moresby or Tsili Tsili started, get them started and they will regale listeners with tales of what it was like back when it was rough, really rough. Believe them. Their actions in common underscored how uncommon each early 41st'er was.

In August of 1943--when it was rough--the military situation in New Guinea was none too favorable. Even though the Jap Kokoda Trail threat had been tamed, things were still sticky. The Allied patrol line extended from a mile south of Salamaua northwesterly across the coastal range and then along those hills and mountains bordering the southern side of the Markham River Valley system. The Japanese still possessed Salamaua, Lae, Finschhafen, and the entire Markham Valley. The main Allied base was Port Moresby, and the two forward bases were Dobodura, on the eastern New Guinea coast, and Tsili Tsili, just short of the advanced inland Australian patrols. All the Old Guys can recount appreciative tales of the great supply work--the lifeline--of the C-47's, which were mostly from the 433rd Troop Carrier Group with some assistance from the 403rd Group.

In the latter part of August of 1943 a few C-47's landed on the kunai flats near Tsili and unloaded some air engineers and equipment. As soon as the strip was burned and leveled, shuttles of C-47's began flying to Tsili. The engineers built two strips, one for fighters and one for transports. The strategy behind these two strips was to station fighters so they could have extended range and better protect the bombers from Moresby on their runs to the Jap strongholds of Wewak, Hansa Bay, and Madang. Tsili, according to the stories, was not a very good place to fly in and and out of. Just ask Dellinger, Fariello, Farrar, or Younkman;

they can tell you about the flying then. The runways were in fair condition, but the hills at each end of both strips made landings and takeoffs difficult.

Difficult? Rough? The 41st Fighter Squadron was in the van of those called upon to stop the ruthless sweep of Jap forces toward Australia. The Old Guys say that there were times during this tense time when the Japs might have been within conversational distance of the trails around Tsili. They also claim that their targets, the number and length of missions carried out (considering the P-39 range), and the air opposition can be stacked against anything that was to come later. They, the Old Guys, hint that the undefined front of the jungle of the early days was the 41st crucible of combat which created a compatriotism that lasted for the life of the squadron. The unity of the squadron was inescapable and inevitable. When a group of men must together face long weeks without mail; when swamp, jungle, rain, humidity, and blazing heat are a part of life; and when the lack of even the smallest of luxuries means that life is reduced to a level of plain and unadorned existence, a bond is formed that is not to be easily broken.

And the mosquitoes. The old timers say that the mosquitoes were more determined, more pugnacious, and more consistently hungry than at any other time. "Be wise, atabrinize" was a slogan that was drilled into the very being of one's existence. Was it Moresby or Tsili, or even Nadzab or Gusap, that gave rise to the famous story about the size of the mosquitoes? Remember? Regular chicken wire was first used as netting to ward off attacks. But a switch to a finer mesh of wire became necessary when the larger mosquitoes began pushing the smaller ones through. Exaggeration is suspicioned, but those mosquitoes contributed to a rough way of life.

The early guys had a belief, a vague belief, in late '43 and early '44. The belief was that there was a possibility that for each of them there was a replacement, that there was relief. Yet because the Old Guys had conditioned themselves to the rough

prospect of a long war, that they, too, would "return" with MacArthur.

Stories abound about the food that was dished out during those early days when it was rough, really rough. Although the squadron cooks were never held in blame--they did the best with what they had--the food had a sameness both as to menu and as to flavor. The rough part was that there did not seem to be any prospect for improvement. Let's see. Who was it? Noel, Owen, Parsons, Alder? Anyway, one of the early guys told the yarn about the isolated and starving Jap soldier who, in desperation, slipped into the 41st chow line on a dank, dark, and dreary evening, was served the meal, and then refused to eat it. He slunk away into the jungle to his preferred meal of grubs, slugs, and snails. Jamie Wallace, John Wallace, Gus Lundberg, Ricky Rouse--the Old Guys tell them best. They were there, and they can tell the stories as well as memory allows but never with any pretentious crap. Their stories run the gamut of emotions, from heartbreak to laughter, yet are plain and simple.

Early New Guinea. What an irony that island is! There are pastoral scenes of idyllic peace which Shelley and Keats might have immortalized, a land of promise and denial. But those pictures cannot tell of the heat, the rank odor of vegetation, the violent, twisting, brown rivers, or of the sinister rain forest. But the Old Guys--a term of affection--keep giving it life with their stories. It is as if they can reach into a cloud bank and pull out a story of planes, of pilots, of camp life, of valor, of what it was like back when 41st life was rough, really rough.

Images

Flying never has a hard time sustaining itself as a subject. As ex-fighter pilots of the 41st Fighter Squadron, the actual flying part of our experiences is still palpable and will remain with us to the end.

Looking back on those wartime flying days, we find ourselves thinking in pictures, mindscape visualizations of a strafing pass, of a heady dive bombing zoom, of a flight amid an ever-changing fleece of clouds, of a cover mission for bombers and sensing an eerie kind of detachment from them, of returning to base enveloped in the grief of a lost friend and cursing the war, of the electrifying elation of seeing your angry fifties hit home, of the voices of our fine-tuned Pratt Whitneys as they sang their reassuring chorus, of an indescribable discomfort as enemy tracers flash threateningly past your wings, of the smug feeling brought on by the perfection of your formation as you overflew your base upon return from a mission, of the incomparable azure of the sky's infinity, of the weather confrontations which would generate both awe and terror, of the sense of competence as you "greased in" another landing, of the magic of lift-off, of looking around as you flew formation and knowing the comfort that came from being airborne with pros, of being so "mission busy" that you did not have time to taste fear, of the instant gratification of getting a kill against the enemy, of the fact that maybe, just maybe, there was an art form underlying all that went into flying, of becoming a part of nature and of things that flew, of killing and destroying on no-apology terms, of the ambivalence of being fearless yet fearing, of the paradox that enemy deaths were abstractions while your own were very real, of the consoling satisfaction of reaching base following a harrowing mission, of leading the squadron, of the joy of knowing those who gave us virtuoso flying performances and brought honor to the squadron, of the feeling of immortality and that we could even reinvent the legend of Icarus but with a happy ending.

The images are endless, and they are still alive within us. Yes, flying never has a hard time sustaining itself as a subject.

Creepy Crawlies

Ah, the South Pacific. Those words conjure up visions of sandy atolls, picturesque islands, mysterious native rites, sarong-clad cinnamon-skinned maidens, azure waters, incredibly green and dense foliage. Truly, these are visions that tempt the uninitiated. But as all 41st'ers know, the reality of the "islands" is a distant cry from the beckoning picture that so many hold in their inexperienced minds.

We--the initiated--know sharply of that reality. We know of, and remember, strange things that would ooze across our mosquito netting, that would slime their way across the dirt floors of our tents, that would sling a viscous strand of webbing from a tent center post to the upper corner of a door flap. We were co-inhabitants with insects of places that were less than enchanting. At first, we became killers of these strange things, these alien bugs and spiders and worms; but we soon learned that their numbers were infinite, and so we let them live. Dr. Albert Schweitzer would have been proud of us as we became, unthinkingly, practioners of his tenet, "reverence for life."

These bugs, spiders, and worms were everywhere, a part of our lives. The islands where we were encamped, each and every one, would have been an entomologist's nirvana. The abundant numbers of "creepy crawlies" amounted to a statement of the fecund vitality of the tropics. And the variations of sizes, shapes, and colors were a testament to the powers of nature and the Creator.

Very often, the relationship between insect and man was reduced to a very personal level. I can remember once in the very early hours of a night on Noemfoor Island when I responded to a late night urgency that could not be denied. Arising from my cot, flinging aside my mosquito netting, I shoved my sockless foot into my shoe. Ah, my urgency would soon be eased. Then I forced my other foot into my other shoe, and queasiness overtook me. Squishing a very large tropical worm between bare toes inside of a GI shoe is unquestionably one of the grossest experiences on earth! Believe me, I know.

Altitude: Minimum

It was like having a license to thrill. When they gave us those pilot wings, they gave us the right to fly at minimum altitude, to fly "on the deck." Overseas, Fighter Wing handed down many missions calling for low altitude tactics. The 41st was assigned many on-the-deck missions in the pursuit of total victory. Those missions were often dicey flights that would test our mettle, our coolness, and our presence of mind because you knew that being alone in that plane was the ultimate in having all your eggs in one basket. Some of those missions loom up from the mind's recesses to waylay the senses and to allow a re-experiencing of what it was like to fly at a chancey and prescribed Altitude: Minimum.

Approach the target. Assume the squadron leader's navigation to be flawless. Flying beneath the radar, armament switches on, our low, thundering, slashing rush of 41st strafing ships attacked. Our hard-hitting 39s, 47s, and 51s, deadly as Medusa, made the enemy pay the toll of war. All of us had to be sharp on these missions, alert to each other, seeking targets of opportunity, so low that we could look "up" at trees. Our sense of speed was heightened as ground structures and plumes of smoke flashed by in a blur of destruction. Legend has it that a pilot of the 41st flew the length of a Jap runway at Wewak eight feet above the ground. Legend or not, the story is indicative of the danger that lurked at "angels zero," especially when flying against ground gun positions. But the danger was a given, easily ignored at a time in our lives when we had a particular talent for malice toward the enemy and for wreaking havoc upon him. These were the kinds of missions that brewed the juices and got them flowing, that threw you into the vortex of combat.

Suddenly, the mission was over; you responded to the squadron leader's call by forming up for the ride home. With the strafing done, you might steal a second to think about it and regain composure. Still flying low, yet ever alert for enemy

aircraft, the past few minutes would race through your mind. They had been hectic, intense minutes. The air had been rough and had bounced and buffetted your plane; the tropical heat and your concentration had combined to make you sweat rivulets that sopped your flight suit. But you were now free to sneak a glance skyward and enjoy the deep and benevolent blue above you and, like a thoroughbred, cool down from the intensity of flying at minimum altitude.

In contrast to the searing emotion of those low altitude missions, there were other occasions when we were on the deck in use of that license to thrill. I have often wondered just how many pilots actually did test-hop a plane beneath the Sydney Bridge or buzz Bondi Beach or fly down Flinders Street in Townsville. Certainly, there is very little truth to the story that a P-39 pilot flew beneath a leaping kangaroo. However, there is truth about pilots listening to a crew chief's pointed remarks as he dug palm splinters and branch fragments from an engine's cowling and wiped green stain marks from a wing's leading edge. Once, returning to Gusap from a patrol mission Sox Johnson took his flight down to zero altitude. I was his wingman, and to this day I can still see the trailing valley of kunai grass created by his prop wash. Low altitude tales abound and can fascinate the listener who might look at some of those low flying exploits as major lunacies. Remember this one? A fighter pilot, forced to bail out at too few precious feet of altitude, popped his chute with just enough height to make one giant swing. At the end of his arc he was laid on a sandy beach as gently as a mother would lay her baby in a crib.

Whether by order or by caprice, flying low was a part of it. The missions could be fraught with tension and emotion. Other times, getting down where the ground was a passing blur a few feet beneath your hurtling plane was "fair dinkum" flying--dangerous and foolhardy, perhaps, but heady and exhilarating. Yes, it was a part of the picture. It was Altitude: Minimum.

Partners

Measure it any way you like, it was a successful mission for Yellow Flight. Two in the air and five on the ground, seven Nip aircraft were destroyed that day by 41st planes. One does not have to tinker with the memory about that kind of a mission; some things remain vivid for a lifetime. But something else happened that day, too, something just as vivid. It is a part of my set of memories unshared by anyone else. Until now.

We had just landed to conclude a mission to Tarakan Island just off northeast Borneo. Taxiing toward the Yellow Flight revetment area, I looked out at my left wing tip and saw one of the flightline personnel standing with a questioning look on his face and with his arms outspread as if to ask, "How did it go?" In an inadvertent move I raised my two hands, thumbs up, first fingers pointed ahead, just like we used to do when we were in our childhood gunslinger days. Then I gave my hands a small jerk as if a recoil had occurred, as if shots had been fired. Next, I raised one finger indicating a "kill," indicating one Jap downed in aerial combat.

That 41st flightline worker immediately got the point as he seemed to register an elation that matched mine. "His" squadron had success; one of "his" pilots had an air victory. I can see it today. He ecstatically leaped in the air, gave me the Roger sign, and in exultation raced to relay the news. This small event still looms large in my mind and, much later, gave me a kind of anguish.

That anguish is the point of this reminiscence, and I wonder if I am alone in this matter. Was I so self-centered and self-serving that I never adequately shared my mission stories and experiences with crew chiefs and armorers and radiomen? In their own way these ground support people were a part of every mission. My anguish is that I left them out, did not give them enough of a sense of mission involvement, did not bring them deeply enough into the camaraderie of the ultimate purpose of the 41st Fighter Squadron.

One of the truths of this matter is that it has returned to my thoughts many times during the decades between the event with that elated ground crewman and the writing of this memory of it. A thoughtful letter from Thumper Huitt brought it all back once again and gave the incident renewed perspective and meaning. Thumper wrote:

> A crew chief was assigned a plane and a crew and he was responsible for "keeping it flying." One of the worst things a crew chief dreaded (and me too) was to have "his" plane snafu from a mission because of mechanical problems. Was it because of what he did or didn't do? Or if for any reason "his" plane and "his" pilot did not return from a mission no one felt worse about it than the crew chief and his crew as they stood helpless and watched the other planes return and taxi to their parking places. It affected me, too. It was the team effort of the ground crews and pilots working and sharing together that made the 41st the number one squadron of the 35th.

With those words, Thumper has given voice to the depth of concern and sense of purpose held by the 41st ground personnel, and that remembered ecstatic leap in the air is an imprint on my mind and is a sobering representation of what I sense to be my neglect of a wonderfully dedicated group of young men. Despite this, they seemed to regard me charitably. Even so, if I were to do it over again I would endeavor to take them more deeply into the partnership that was the 41st Fighter Squadron.

Dive!

For many of us, our 41st reunions have caused us to tap our memory bank and withdraw assets deposited long ago, riches from the past. And so we are becoming very good at conjuring up and cashing in on the past through our many mutual overseas experiences. We share and remember long-deposited caches: Sydney leaves, tent life, weather, missions, and the flying. Always the flying. Each of us has a tale to tell about the flying. God, wasn't the flying wonderful? Listen. I remember once when I was alone--I forget the circumstances--and intentially put my Jug into a dive.

Well, that dive was a nose-down, throttle on, vertical banger that surpassed by far the thrill of my first youthful roller coaster ride coming down off that first peak. Scary. To get into this dive, I made a split-S maneuver so had considerable speed at the outset. A little fantasy, a little imagination must have been a part of this thing for me to have even attempted this flying circus trick. My mind must have taken a holiday, but I was into it. Down, down, down with the speed of a lightning bolt. Down, down, down with gravity as my partner. Down, down, down with Ma Earth looming ever more distinctly. Then my practiced pilot's eye scanned the instrument panel and picked up an air speed reading of 475 miles per hour and isolated a spinning altimeter reading as it passed six thousand feet; time to pull out of this foolhardiness. Can you remember what that was like? The pull out? No apocrypha here; the classic things actually happened. I became much heavier with the tug of G forces. My cheeks sagged down, even more than they do today. There was evidence of blackout. Eyelids grew heavy. Sphincter inversion. My socks rolled down. Through it all, the Jug was flawless, a perfect lady to be with in a dive.

But why did I do this thing, this dive? I had heard countless stories about P-47s in dives. I probably wanted merely to see what it was really like, to experience it myself. Man is so often ultimately held in the vise of his own mistakes; but this, as it developed, was not a mistake or a case of flip bravado. No, it was something I had to do. I just wanted to find out about the P-47 in a dive. God, wasn't the flying wonderful?

Flying Wing and the Diary Thing

Wouldn't it have been wonderful if we had all faithfully kept diaries? With our senses attuned and awake to everything? We would all suddenly become better memorists. We could look back now and know that we were more than just young men who rode vectors and who were all too often unconcerned about consequences. Because we would have been more aware of events and surroundings and alert to writing down reactions and recording the stories that we were living, we could probably fill pages with fascinating word pictures of our war years. Had I kept a better diary, my experiences of flying wing, for example, would unquestionably have been better catalogued.

Remember? Flying wing well was a vital part of contributing to the strength of the flight and the squadron. Staying in position was all-important, and the "new guy" needed to be reminded of this only once. I can recall a time when Fariello asked me over the air, with all the subtlety of a train wreck, if I enjoyed flying solo and would I care to join the rest of the squadron? Quick lesson with a quicker remedy. While a good leader could be comforting to a wingman, a good wingman allowed a leader to be more effective.

Training planes aside, the only plane in which I flew wing was the P-47, an easy-flying plane at wing. It was responsive, invariably trimmed well, possessed good visibility, and had favorable ergonomics, that is, man and machine "fit" together nicely. Another thing, it was a forgiving plane that was effective at any altitude. I know, I know, arguments can be made that the 39's and 51's were every bit as good; but, as I said, I only knew about the 47 at wing.

Flying wing, good wing, was often dependent on the leader. Some leaders--Parsons, Alder, Fariello, Farrar, as examples--were easy to fly with; actually, they wouldn't just fly, they would soar. So they were easy to stay with. Others might be more challenging. You thought you were in the slot, then got your swivel-

necked head turning, turning, turning to scan the area, then checked your position on your leader. For Chrissakes, he was a hundred feet above or below you! Pick an altitude! Of course, as a wingman, it wasn't your fault. Or maybe he would drop his tanks just as you were about to cross under. That could test the old equanimity. Really, though, it wasn't that bad. Worst scenario situations just seem to occasionally arise in recall's imaginings.

Practically all wingmen were new in the squadron, unjaded, in awe of the old timers--young pilots who were captives of their own naive heroic aura and trying to "get in synch" with the routine of the outfit and the flying. For the most part, they knew their plane well. They could take off and land and maneuver, and they knew the quirks of the Jug--that it was great in a shallow high speed climb, that it was less than great in a steep climb, that it had a glide pattern like a set of car keys (Tom Wolfe's words). But "newness" was a factor to contend with in the business of flying wing.

Newness ripened to "oldness." Pilots soon became adept at flying wing, at being solid in the job of backing their element and flight leaders. Where they once flew between doubt and desperation, they soon began to fly between confidence and assurance. And wingmen became leaders, evolution through experience, tenure, and the glacial advance of time. As 41st'ers, our talisman was our flying prowess; and our flying prowess was the symbol of our trade as much as the Flying Buzz Saw was the symbol of our squadron. Wingmen were a distinct part of the picture.

But just think how much depth a good diary could have brought to a retrospection of flying wing, how old diary-found details could have breathed life into our experiences at wing or to any other matter associated with those overseas years. As it is, we can only look back on "our war" as a kind of mystic flying Brigadoon when time stood still and only then relive those years in the interior of our minds.

Nanette Revisited

Every now and then a reader will come across a book that has staying power, that sticks in the mind and heart. The reasons for this are many, but content--what the book is about--can be one of the strongest reasons. Ted Park's Nanette has to be compelling reading for any World War II pilot, especially a South Pacific theater pilot, more especially a fighter pilot, even more especially a 41st Fighter Squadron pilot. And those early guys, the squadron members from Townsville up through, say, Gusap, should really have a genuine feeling for Park's words. For them, the recall should be gripping. Parsons, Kyro, Alder, Farrar, Noel, Little Wag, K. Brown, Colley, Dellinger, Younkman, Owen, Jamie Wallace, Rouse, John Wallace, Fariello, Lundberg, and all the rest--for them, Nanette simply and heartwarmingly italicizes the experiences of the early 41st through Park's mythic, mystic Gopher Squadron. If you think deja vu cannot be copywrighted, try this book. The author states in his introduction about Nanette, "It's an Exaggeration." That is true and yet it isn't, as any 41st reader will understand. The exaggeration, and the fantasy, will absolutely charm you and make you remember, vividly remember.

Nanette goes beyond those early guys. The entire stream of pilot talent that winged through the 41st should appreciate Nanette. In all of its unbowdlerized purity, the book is a treasury of wartime vignettes that constitute point and significance; it is definitely not a cul-de-sac of a book that leads to nothing. Eminently re-readable, it can make you leaf through the pages of that now distant part of your life only to bring those days closer, to reaffirm them. Nanette can help to renew a 41st'er's understanding of just why he manned American ramparts in New Guinea nearly fifty years ago.

While Nanette is fun reading (the Park wit is quite evident), it is also a sobering book. The book makes the point that the fighter squadron's business is collaborative; that all of us

were, on occasion, targets; that airplanes could trivialize distance; that when you flew around fifty or more missions you were a fugitive from the law of averages; that the value of squadron ground support was incalculable; that there was a kind of scary, undefinable "edge" to the business of combat flying; that there were sorrowing losses of fellow pilots. Nanette has managed to renew the gamut of impressions that fall to the fighter pilot, especially to those men out of the 41st's Airacobra days, and is surprisingly faithful to the New Guinea atmosphere.

The early guys, one can imagine, would truly thrill to the reverie of once again being at the controls of a P-39; Nanette lets them do this. Park's Nanette--the name of his plane--with all of her bratty idiosyncrasies was a character unto herself; and all erstwhile P-39 pilots will understand this and will also understand Park's love affair with her. After all, they might have had similar emotional involvements with other equally self-assertive P-39s.

One must remember this: Nanette is not just a 41st story; it has and deserves a much broader audience and should be recommended in that way. In staying clear of the psychobabble found in so many war books trying to explain the emotional state of fighting men, Nanette comes off remarkably well as the presentation of a story by one "who was there." Forthright and honest, the book does not strain the credulity of the uninitiated; and for those who experienced the threatening immediacy of the Moresby-TsiliTsili-Nadzab era, Park's book will bring much of it back, even making the work a "must" as an inclusion in one's personal library. It is a pilot's book written by a pilot; the authority cannot be questioned.

The reader can be grateful that the author survived not only aerial combat, but jungle rot, dysentery, jaundice, dengue, and malaria threats as well. With his copywright of Nanette, Edwards Park has a significant intellectual property, and his images are there for all time.

New Orleans ~ 1992

41st Fighter Squadron

New Orleans
May, 1992

To the Buzz Saw Gang,

Enjoy! Enjoy! We meet once again in celebration of our shared experiences and more solidly knit than ever in our 41st Fighter Squadron alliance. For many of us, time has sideswiped our vision of the past; but through the hints, nuances, stories, and ideas that emerge from our reminiscing, our powers of recall have become broadened and more defined. In my own case, and as a result of this new-found power of recall, I sense that I am a reflection of my salad days, of my younger self--a dazzled Odysseus enchanted and amazed and awed by that journey through the South Pacific. As I was then in reality, so I am now in memory.

And that memory--that strained memory--has led to another packet of personal musings which, if they are in any way successful, might lead you to remember, reflect, re-establish a mood, recreate a mind picture, even relive once-held emotions. Above all, I hope that you find my musings enjoyable and somehow rewarding as 1992 backward glances.

Dick DeBaugh

Those Faces -- In Memory

War is a casual mistress. She unheedingly takes young lives that are prime. None of us need reminding that she took some of us. 41st'ers were lost. All of us know that there are hallowed spots in the South Pacific where we lived and flew, where a 41st friend plunged into the sea or into the rain forest, where a tentmate was caught by a fiery crash or an enemy bullet. The struggle of memory against the obliterating forces of time becomes more difficult, but what cannot be erased are those faces of comrades who flew with us. Some of us were with them when they flew their last missions.

The 41st may well be a blurred-around-the-edges vision, but those faces are etched in our memories for as long as we live. There were too many losses; a single one would have been too many. But we must remember those faces as friends and compatriots in our cause and in our 41st Fighter Squadron family. We must pay homage to those faces that ennobled the 41st.

Things, places, people cross our paths as we traverse life; much happens to us that affects us in our minds as well as in our hearts. All of those faces "happened" to us and are a part of us, indelible and sacrosanct. We remember them, those faces.

Remember?

About the flying. Remember? Diverse are the promptings that take me back to what it was like being airborne and at the controls. I'm talking about the old Jug days; even those who stayed in the service and ended up flying jets will be able to recall the old Jug days. Of course, flying is flying, differences in individual planes and types of planes being a given. But I'm talking about the 41st Jug days when we mutually knew of the sensitive rudder and the responsive aileron. Forget about those other things that the recesses of the mind can spew out: the infinite blue, the clouds in their ever-original shapes, being part of a sixteen-ship formation, all the stuff that is important and is a part of the set of memories that each of us has. I'm talking about the actual flying, and when the odors of the cockpit were as an elixir.

The hands. The hands had a variety of functions. The right hand "spoke" to the plane through the gentle manipulation of the control stick; seldom was the stick wrenched. Steady, sure pressure was given, and the plane responded. Eye to brain to hand, the plane responded smoothly whether the maneuver was sudden or deliberately slow. And experience was a part of the picture. Experience was not only a fine teacher, experience was also an exquisite polisher of flying technique. The hands. The left hand functioned, always in concert with the right, as a co-pilot adjusting throttle and prop pitch, always sensitive to the needs of any given air situation.

The feet. The feet echoed the hands with deftly sure pressures on the pedals. As the hands never wrenched, the feet never kicked. Total and quick control of the plane was always possible without violence of movement. As all of us remember, the feet worked <u>with</u> the hands, and the word that was always used to describe proper flying was "coordination." Through primary, basic, advanced, and fighter training stages, coordination was the one thing that was drilled into us and is common to all kinds of flying. Coordination is the touchstone of flying genius, basic to the total process. While the flying was something that called for the deft physical touch, it also had a cerebral essence. We were able to put it all together: the hands, the feet, the brain. Remember? And we took it all for granted as it became an automatic talent.

C. O.

(Nearly fifty years have passed since I was in that small room. That room was part of the 41st Fighter Squadron headquarters, the Commanding Officer's room. It was the office from which he guided the squadron's business and made the decisions that befell him. It was an airy room, screened against the entomology of the region. Spartan in its furnishings, the room was utilitarian and sensibly arranged; and from it the Commanding Officer held sway and was "in charge." On my second day with the 41st I was summoned to that room. Nearly fifty years past, yet the moments I spent in that room are still alive, still painted vividly in my mind. Turning the pages of time back to that room and my visit there is easy to do, an easy bit of mind legerdemain to return to that gray morning at Gusap, to that small room, and to meet Captain Douglas Parsons, Commanding Officer of the 41st Fighter Squadron.)

Frank Riedle joined the 41st at the same time with me. Settling into the squadron was the main item of business at the beginning, and we were both anxious to start flying again, to get into the air after being in transit from the States to our new home. For three weeks we had not been at the controls of a Jug, and we were eager to try our skills and become active again and to fly as new members of the squadron. But first, some indoctrination was needed, some of the "green" had to be rubbed off. Naturally, we had met many of the old hands already and had had brief chats with them, mostly about the States and what was going on back home. Then the call came to report to the C. O.

I was impressed with my new C. O. Truly memorable people occur seldom in one's lifetime, but Doug Parsons made a lasting impression on me for many reasons. As we began our meeting that day, he was sensitive to Frank and me in terms of our apprehensions and our newness. He immediately put us at ease with his

politeness, a Christian grace that flowed from his heart. His first words extolled the 41st; he was proud of his outfit and his command. He made a strong case for the 41st--that it had a distinctive tang and texture, that it had a sustaining virility and energy, that it was imbued with an edgy vitality. This ingratiating new C. O. quickly made us feel that the 41st was a most agreeable assignment; we could feel the roots of pride begin to grow within us. Doug continued his overview of the squadron: the men, the planes, and the flying. He let us know of the expectations he had for us; he let us know that we were expected to fly and learn and carry our share of the load and effectively do what we were called on to do. He gave the emphasis of praise to all of the men in his command, but then he centered on the pilots: that they were good in the air, that the old timers had the kind of air experiences that gave them value as leaders, that we, as newly assigned 41st'ers, would be flying with legends. While Frank and I understood what he was saying about his pilots--Parson's Pilots--we also understood that he, too, was one of those legends; it surfaced through his modesty, his sense of perspective, even his sense of humor. As he spoke to us, we were struck with this man who evoked in us the feeling that he was humane, fair, concerned; in a word, he created confidence so that Frank and I felt less and less to be wanderers in an alien place.

Next, he turned to some displayed maps of the New Guinea area over which we would be flying, telling us of the terrain, landmarks, weather, and the enemy. Doug offered no polemical about the war--its conduct and strategy--as he developed our New Guinea orientation. Rather, he gave us a concise and coherent situation picture as he saw it. At the close of our meeting he patiently fielded our questions and officially welcomed us as new members of the 41st.

My initial impressions of Doug proved to be justified in the months that followed. As a C. O. he comported admirably by being exemplary, by displaying effective leadership, by proving

that he was responsible. For me, he came to epitomize what a C. O. should be; he was one-of-a-kind in my military career.

Following the meeting in that small room, Frank and I returned to our tent very content to be under the command of Doug Parsons and were imbued with the idea that civility among men was a basic tenet of the outfit. He enhanced our need and desire to do good work and to serve the country and to show that one can exist in a state of grace, including going to war. Commanding Officer Douglas Parsons was memorable as a person and in his job, a jewel among the 41st Fighter Squadron's assets who made all of us who served under him the beneficiaries of his leadership.

Weather, Weather, Weather

Man is a weather-sensitive creature. He uses weather to his own advantage, and he is often victimized by it. Above all, he is constantly aware of it. Weather ingredients are common enough: sunshine and cloud, cold and heat, wind and calm, and the many forms of precipitation. During those piloting days in the South Pacific, we 41st'ers were ever-watchful of the skies.

Few of us, as pilots, were really well versed in the details of weather mechanisms. Oh, sure, we had the requisite courses in weather during each stage of our cadet days; but those studies merely spoke "about" the weather and weather theory. They did not let us "experience" weather in the pilotage sense. But when we reached our theater of combat and flew with the 41st, each of us had our confrontations with weather. The weather brought us anguish, fear, apprehension, consternation, anger; and in a very singular way it made us humble. As men who watched the pageantry of the skies, we soon learned of the force and power that the various forms of weather could exert. We learned about "Black clouds, with heaven's artillery fraught," as John Milton told of in his Paradise Lost, which made us all the more appreciative of those benign flying days that were windless and held ceilings of blue.

Each of us has a weather story to tell. The sweep of rain, daily, at Gusap and Nadzab which at times seemed not to hit the ground because it came at us horizontally. The winds of Morotai which tested our aviator's art by causing constant cross-wind landings. The daily cloud build-up over the mountain ranges bordering the Ramu and Markham river valleys. Flying back from the Philippines and dealing with a developing frontal barrier that was building to sixty thousand feet. Piloting over water through a tropical downpour unsure of the altimeter setting or the base of the cloud height or where the rain and water surface met. The disorientation that can be experienced "inside" of a cloud. Learning, with finality, of the sovereignty of nature.

Yes, the weather could be an ally, but it could also be an enemy--a death-dealing enemy. We developed a respect for the weather. Just as storms make trees take deeper roots, we became better pilots because of our weather savvy. We could not improve the weather, but we could improve at flying through the weather.

Search

While time has rinsed from memory the specifics of most missions, I can nevertheless recall one that while classified as a combat mission was actually humanitarian in purpose. Even though the mission is of misty origins, I do know and remember the basic situation. A pilot (not of the 35th) was down, reportedly awash and in a raft in the waters off Madang, Astrolabe Bay, northeast New Guinea. The search mission that had been requested fell to the lot of the 41st Fighter Squadron although just why the mission devolved upon our outfit is unclear. At any rate, the mission was ours, and we proceeded to carry it out with a two-ship flight made up of an experienced pilot, Frank Fariello, and a pilot newly emboldened by ten missions, one Dick DeBaugh. Both of us probably "just happened" to be available; the squadron had another mission going on at the same time.

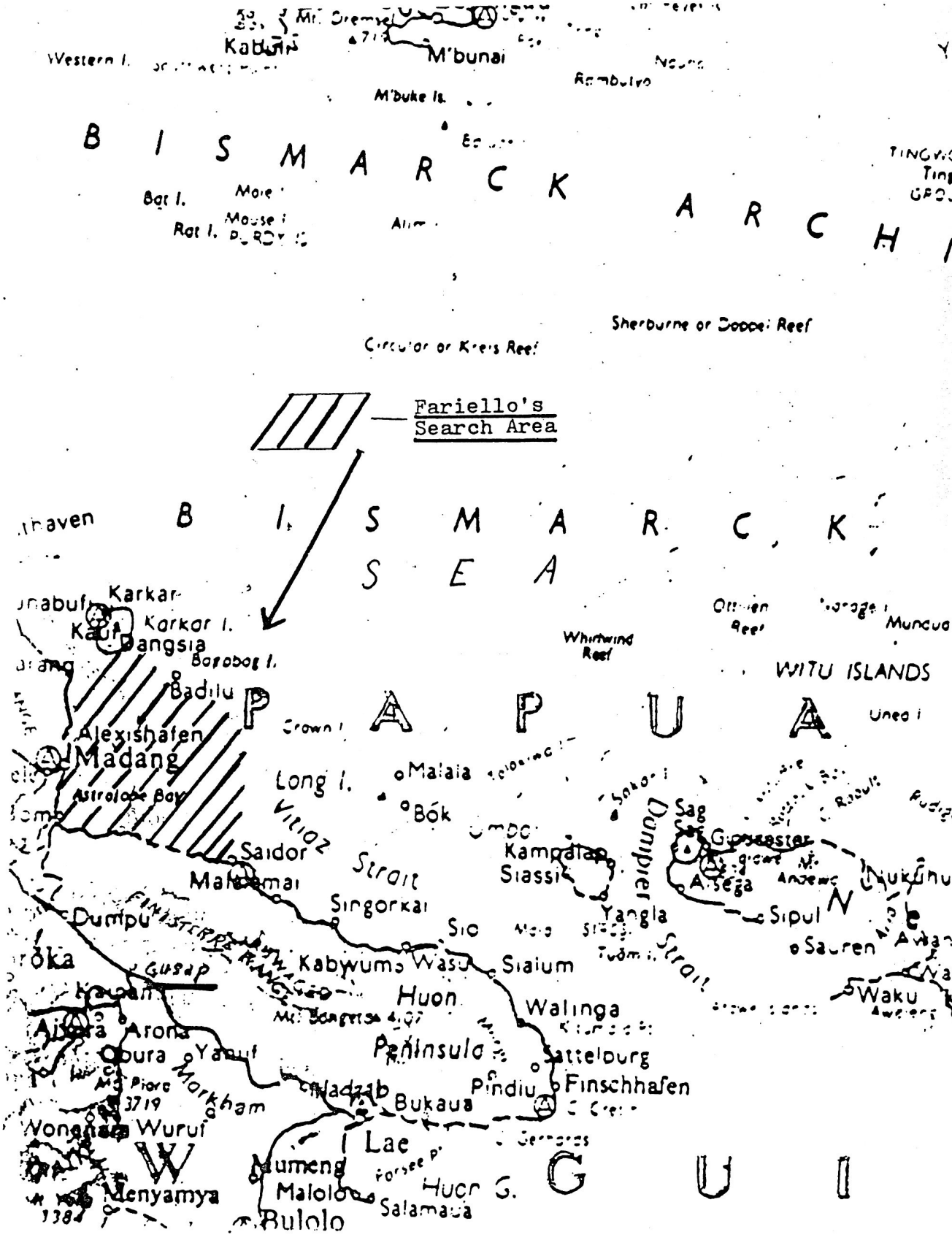
Leaving Gusap in the early afternoon, Frank led his two-ship flight north to the waters off Madang and Alexishafen where a systematic search, criss-crossing and flying grid patterns, was carried out in the hunt for the downed flier. There we were, Fariello and DeBaugh, young men who might have been dashing beaux sabreurs in an earlier century (it is interesting to think) but were now 20th Century equivalents: fighter pilots in search of a poor fellow flier in a dire state. And that poor flier, if yet alive, did not have much in his favor; the weather in the search area was not conducive to effective searching, and the water conditions appeared, from the air, to be very threatening to anyone in a life raft. As we flew the mission, Frank kept me abreast of him but perhaps a thousand feet distant at the same altitude, which varied from 500 to 800 feet. We were within easy sight of each other yet were uneasy about the heavy weather; no multiform fleece of clouds this day.

The New Guinea coastline was often obscured by low scud clouds. The entire area was a monochromatic gray world--horizon,

clouds, and sea were as one. We methodically searched keeping aware of each other while constantly scanning the waters below, both of us hoping and praying for a sighting, willing that a life raft emerge as a bright yellow beacon against that gray sea. But it was not to be. Denying despair, Frank and I pursued our cause of finding that downed pilot. After two hours of pressing for that stroke of luck, it was not to be. This was World War II, a time of the most focused national energies that our country ever experienced; and here we were on a mercy mission, members of a fighter squadron emblemized by a flying buzz saw. In the face of that irony Frank continued to lead in the search for some nameless ally, someone in his youthful prime. In our fervent desire to make a sighting and after an eternity of reading the seas below, strange things could happen.

When your eye makes a quick jerk known as a saccadic movement--almost immeasurably fast--you can imagine seeing anything including that which you might be seeking. A tiny whitecap becomes a raft, the splash of a fish a swimmer's arm, a floating branch an airplane part. My own saccadic flashes all led to disappointing imaginings. What I thought were pure, unconflicted, split-second sightings led to dejected feelings of failure; and Frank and I could only feel a surrogate kind of pain for that downed flier as the weather worsened and as we were forced, for our own safety, to give up and return to Gusap, soon to be bathed in darkness. Frank must have suffered as he gave his report on this fruitless search mission, but the effort made was earnest and thorough.

I have often thought of that downed airman, that fellow pilot. Perhaps he was saved. Perhaps through intelligent resourcefulness he made it to safety. Perhaps good fortune prevailed for him. To this day, I think about him. Whatever the lot of that airman, war--the ultimate obscenity--had dealt him a bitter blow. On that day Old Man Fate had him in his crosshairs.



A "REMINDER" MAP

Island

New Guinea. It was the feel of the place. New Guinea now seems like the beginning of nowhere, remote in the vagaries of memory and distant in the stream of time. In looking back, nothing was wrong with New Guinea; understanding was all that it needed. Five decades ago we tested our skills in the skies over those equatorial latitudes, were amazed by the fecund rain forests, saw tropical brown rivers plying their epochal work of reducing New Guinea, particle by particle, to the level of the sea, contended with weather that could drench you with rain or with sweat.

As if it had suddenly risen up out of the primordial soup, New Guinea created, in us 41st'ers a distinct feel about the place. We had a precise sensitivity to it, overarching and deep seated. And we had to be pliant enough to fit ourselves into the demands of that long-ago island, demands that were hard and explicit. Plant life, animal life, topography, climate--all of these things, and more, built in us a strong sense of where we were. All of us were very much aware of that vari-textured island. Remember its tapestry? The sweep of the New Guinea landscape was an artist's trove: dramatic rock formations, skies at once both threatening and benign, waves of dagger-like kunai grass, mountains that scarred the heavens, rolling seas, elemental native villages, and forest, forest, sinister rain forest everywhere, overwhelming in its mystery. Willa Cather, in My Antonia, said of the American prairie, "Between that earth and that sky I felt erased, blotted out." New Guinea could do that to you in the same way, reduce you to a kind of insignificance.

One of our New Guinea camps, Gusap, was an interesting place, including its location. Not too far from the Ramu River, our camp was also not too far from the beginnings of a rain forest area. On an exploratory hike one time at Gusap, a few

of us ventured into that forest area after oscillating for a while between approach and avoidance. I can recall going a hundred yards or so into the trees which soon became very thick with increasingly dense undergrowth. While it may not have been the real thing yet as a true rain forest, it nevertheless had a kind of mesmeric animal stillness that gave one a sense of returning to a prehistoric age. The trees had great branches spread like sails to the sky and wind, and one could only imagine how those high tree tops would adversarily cope with violent weather and how they would flex in a storm dance against their roots. But on this day all was quiet; movement was replaced by a smell indescribable because there was no name for it. This bit of New Guinea rain forest seemed pregnant with mystery, a place of energy rampant, vitally alive with exotica. Its paradox was that it seemed to be moving and growing while sinking to mold on the forest floor.

New Guinea. It was the feel of the place. Other than with awe, there was no way to view the mountains, improbably sudden in their lift to the skies. In bad weather, the mountains took on added dimension. More than one pilot, they say, hit a rock at 8000 feet of altitude. Yet the mountains were allies as well as enemies. They could be landmark guideposts, and they could offer valleys and cols of gas-saving virtue. Yes, the mountains were part of the "feel" of New Guinea, and I have often reminisced that the Finisterre Range offered a sierra of mountain beauty.

Displaying its own kind of beauty, that wildness of water, the Ramu River, was not exactly the best place to swim; but many of us tried a few strokes there. The water was swift and brown and, in a few places, narrow enough to cross with just a few fast flailing crawl strokes--indeed a swimming feat. Or one could go with the current downstream, scramble ashore, and then make the difficult hike back upstream along the rock-strewn shore. (A picture stays with me. In that picture the 41st's Rebel Air Force, or part of it, is darting downstream

with hilarious joy and abandon. Three heads are bobbing in the Ramu; Rowell, Scotty, and Saunders, in my picture, are immersed in the river and in their joy. Unforgettable!) We swimmers were just too perverse to worry about the cautions against liver-fluke infections that could follow a swim in the Ramu. As for rivers, I still hold a sense of foreboding about the Sepik and the Sepik River country. The Sepik stories and warnings made it Death's own country, and they added to the feel of the place.

I could go on. More details would only add to the New Guinea aura, an aura that held a beauty of its own. Youthful and insensitive lout that I was, I neither understood nor appreciated New Guinea's kind of beauty. It was a place where everything mysteriously connected to everything else; and it seemed almost impenetrable because of its size, its lavish plant growth, its prevalence of diseases, its strange native inhabitants, its weather changes, its lush tropicality, its inherent dangers. New Guinea was water and sky, horizon, spectacular vistas, and an arena of war. A day could be tranquil, or it could have a tropical reek. A night could be blissful for its rest, or it could be filled with quandary about tomorrow. Much of it unexplored and untouched, New Guinea was full of startling images and could affect you, could get inside of your mind. It was the feel of the place.

Doc

He was handsome and robust, a distinct presence among the men of the 41st Fighter Squadron; and he filled a need among them. He was the outfit's medical expert, a job that the Air Force quixotically entitled Flight Surgeon. Regardless of the title, Doc Fenlaw wore the mantle well and performed his duties devotedly and professionally.

While his medical attentions and ministrations were valued assets in the 41st, his influence was much deeper and surfaced in unexpected ways. He was a listener extraordinaire, patiently hearing out any problem or anxiety one might bring to him--a trait well learned through the medical dictum, "Listen to your patient." So while Doc could ferret out a diagnosis, a physical problem, a cure, he could also deal with "his boys" in terms of that mysterious and murky world of human mood and emotion. In a word, he "heard" what we were saying, what we were about. Doc Fenlaw epitomized Lord Byron's line, "In short, there never was a better listener."

But, also, Doc could contribute to and elevate a conversation. A discourse with him was an elation as he brought his maturity, intelligence, and sense of humor to bear on any topic. He was a boon to the squadron as an intellectual and as one who could accept and adapt to the earthiness of the male environment in which he functioned and lived.

That environment--wartime, early 1940's, South Pacific--held tension and risk and quandary and foreboding. Doc Fenlaw, through kind and judicious counselling and because of his perspective of the wartime human condition, was a very special person who could allay doubt and fear and increase one's comfort quotient. It is little wonder that he was revered in the triple terms of doctor, confidant, and friend.

In every particular--his manner, his presence, his concern--he earned from his 41st Fighter Squadron compatriots the ultimate in love and esteem. Among these men, such was the figure of Doctor Joe Fenlaw.

Another Culture

Those Papuan natives. Remember them? Small, black, woolly haired, they seemed to be a proud and happy people. We had to view them with a kind of compassionate disinterest--we had to get on with the war--yet still admire them for their seeming resignation toward their destinies and their primitiveness. The intrusion into their lives of the war and the war's strange kind of modernity must have amazed them. At the time, I can remember feeling sorry for them in an ambivalent way: they appeared to be feeling sorry for me. Indeed, they were of another culture, grist for anthropological thinking, as they presented a stark contrast to our own American civilization. Even so, they were our equals as God's children and earth's inhabitants.

Pleasant, soft-spoken, often cheerful, they were imbued with the belief that all American soldiers had been created for the sole purpose of distributing largesse. I can remember that those Papuans of fifty years ago always seemed to be dusty looking in appearance. We grew accustomed to seeing lines of the dark-skinned people straggling along the edge of the road, their feet either slapping flatly in the dust or sucking at the mud with each step. With exquisite poise, the women, mammarily pendulous, delicately balanced strange cargoes atop their heads while surrounded by naked children of a coffee hue.

At first, we naively looked for sarongs, but the usual find was a seedy looking swatch of cloth, normally red, fastened at the waist and draped in the form of a skirt, called a laplap. The natives often had head ornaments such as brightly colored flowers or even feathers stuck in their hair. Occasionally, one could be seen wearing a bracelet on the upper arm. In general, their appearance was one of sameness. Children are always noticed as being children; but the adults, men and women, seemed to be similarly clad according to the dictates of the climate.

The caprice of personal memory is dangerous to be set loose on the page, but I still have a firm picture of one particular

scene. A group of natives came through camp, perhaps twenty in all. While it would have been foolish to guess the ages of any of them, they were apparently being led by an ancient matriarchal figure, bent like a question mark, and solidly in charge. They were a purposeful train of people with, I guessed, a definite destination. Many of them smiled at me and held out their hands, but the old termagant leader countenanced no dallying as she barked at them, sergeant-like, to keep moving. Yes, they were people of strange habits, foods, superstitions, and beliefs. Their very own island, their homeland, was one that did not seem to encourage health, vigor, or ambition; but it was theirs.

A C-47 pilot and I (we were in the same cadet class) crossed paths at the Biak flightline by chance. After renewing our friendship and tracing our careers, we talked about many things. One of those things was about the Papuan natives, which were often used or hired to load and unload the C-47's. My friend's story revealed that the natives were very energetic in the mornings. For their noon meals, he said, they ate quite varied foods: maybe boiled rice served on a large leaf with an occasional grub garnish or small lizard as an added delicacy. They would also eat such items as yams, mangoes, bananas, and coconuts. Supposedly, one of their favorites desserts was tooth paste, supplied by American troops. After lunch, according to my old friend, native energy seemed to decline as they began to chew the drug-like betel nut which would tend to make them dopey and sleepy. By late afternoon, they were all spitting red and were overcome by lethargy.

Native stories were many and varied and provided a cultural experience for the outsider. From head hunters to pygmies, from polygamous tribes to eerie clans that indulged in human sacrificial rites, the stories were there for the Margaret Meads of the world to investigate. The natives of Papuan New Guinea might have been primitive people with the most simple of faiths and incomprehensible customs; but they were very human, very alive, very sensitive to life. And they existed as our co-inhabitants on the planet.

Mission of Futility

"....there I was at 20,000 feet....he came at me out of the sun....saw him in time....banked hard to the left and up.. ..it was a firing head-on pass....sonofabitch....neither of us could get our guns to bear....I corkscrewed around and down.... on his tail now....the dumbass can't dive away from a 47.... there, in the crosshairs....sent my fifties down his ass.... blew him to bits....exploded....a Zeke all over the sky and too damn close....flew through the debris of his disintegrating plane....one less enemy plane....one less enemy pilot...."

I wish!

That would have been one of those missions to talk and talk about. A mission that you could recount with just the right touch of heroic aplomb or aw-shucks modesty. But for contrast, here is a true story of the opposite kind of mission--for me, at least.

Morotai. Nearly all of our missions had been north to the Philippines or west toward the Celebes and Borneo. This flight was an exception; it went south to Ceram, a flight that was to last seven hours. Supposedly, there was Japanese activity of retreat centered at a place called Bula and along the north coast of Ceram. Our job was to search for and strafe targets of opportunity.

Bob Dorothy was the squadron leader that day, and his leadership was smooth and canny as he took his twelve-ship threat of Jugs, midmorning, through dicey weather that presented draperies of fleece against distant and darker backdrops, the kind of weather that offered warnings to the experienced Pacific pilot. But Captain Dorothy got us to the target area without trouble, and the entire north coast of Ceram was clear, easy pickings if any targets were sighted. Ceram, an island lying east-west, is about 250 miles long. We hit it about midpoint and turned east toward Bula descending to 800 feet. The search for targets was on, and we were to be rewarded. Within ten minutes Dorothy spotted a small flotilla of shore-hugging barges,

obviously Japanese and obviously laden with war materials. One of the barges even flew the rising sun flag; a couple were carrying military trucks. Hot damn, show time!

The squadron leader took his flight in against indifferent resistance fire from the barges, and the first four ships scored decisive hits. The second flight performed equally well. By now a few of the barges were flaming; the final four ships, Yellow Flight, bored in on the targets. I was leading Yellow Flight and took my four ships down picking the barges toward the end of the target group. Closing in, gun switch on, gun sight beading in--this was the catbird seat if ever there was one. Now! Squeeze that trigger! Squirt those fifties! Drill those targets! Squeeze! Squirt! Drill! Shitshitshit! Nothing! Nothing! Nothing! Not a goddamned gun fired. I was stunned, overwhelmed by exasperation, enveloped by frustration.

The squadron made several more passes, decimating the targets. But my subsequent passes continued futilely. I simply could not get my guns to fire. Disappointment and anger raged within me. Then, despite my surly state of mind, I heard Bob Dorothy's radio call to form up for the ride back to Morotai.

While the mission was an unqualified success for the squadron, I was percussively spewing profanities to myself instead of trailing 41st clouds of glory. In my own kind of low-key fury I realized I had missed a prime opportunity. The Japs were malevolent little bastards, and I had missed a chance at them because of a gun malfunction. Maybe another time, another place.

Dorothy led the way home, mission accomplished with nobody hurt and no planes damaged. Some of the distant towering clouds were turning the color of soot, as black as my disposition. My sour outlook, fermented in disappointment, was gradually leavened by pride in my fellow 41st'ers for the job they had done and by my plane, reliable old Number 172, which "spoke" to me with solace as we once again teamed through another mission. Even though that flight was one of personal frustration, a mission of futility.

The Foe

He was a tough enemy. Even after Guadalcanal, one of the war's turning points, and even though he was on the run, he was a tough enemy. Uncompromising in his devotion to his cause, relentless in his pursuit of victory, ready to die for his emperor, he was an adversary to be reckoned with.

The attitude of the American forces toward the enemy--and certainly within the 41st Fighter Squadron--was that the enemy must be humiliated in his defeat. The war must be a war of attrition; it was the only way. That was why the 41st was there. In this, we all agreed. Our agreement stemmed from an attitudinal common denominator: hatred of the Japanese. And why not? Pearl Harbor, Corrigedor, Bataan, the Death March were all a part of our psyches which undergirded and bred hatred and repugnance of the Jap and his atrocities. To our credit, we tended to be well-adjusted young men who never became so consumed by our attitude toward the enemy that we were unable to do our jobs. But hatred, in its own way, was the spirit of the day; it was the general trend of thought and feeling that permeated that particular time of our lives.

Historically, Americans have had other enemies against whom battle lines were drawn. Yet all the ill will ever directed at "the bloody Redcoat," "the cruel Spaniard," or even "the beastly Hun" paled in comparison with the unbridled fear, hatred, and distrust which most Americans felt toward the Japanese. Therefore, it is little wonder that we 41st'ers flew with a kind of elemental hatred that caused us to become willing practioners in the art of killing and destroying, willing embracers of the gods of war.

From a 1990's retrospective, is it not amazing how we relished our jobs, how eagerly we flew into harm's way, how we enjoyed being dealers in death, and, yes, how we even found pleasure in killing?

Back to the States

The Group Adjutant asked me if I'd like to go back to the States. Home! I immediately told him that I thought it was a good idea, a very good idea. Although I had been in Group Headquarters and serving as Assistant Airdrome Officer for Clark Field for a month, I soon would have been back on duty flying combat with any of the three squadrons in the 35th Fighter Group. Certainly, in combat there is always an intimation of mortality that can be subduing. So after sixteen months of being overseas, I felt that I had tested the waters enough, had pressed my luck enough. Going back to the States was, indeed, a good idea.

But why did I gradually begin to have reservations about it? Why the ambivalence? While the news of going home was the illumination of a moment of intense feeling, the end of my overseas stint was more whimper than bang. I would not have wanted a brass band, but apparently my sixteen months were to be figuratively sealed, packaged, and stored away on shelves, high up and out of reach if not out of mind. To hell with all that. The chance to return to the States was a happy instance, and it did promote a new sense of tranquility. Now, I could give up my fatalism.

Going home meant getting home and that meant a thirty-day cruise, Leyte to San Francisco. It was, in looking at it today, a cruise that allowed me to reflect on those fifteen months as a 41st'er. Those reflections enabled me to firm up and to retain more strongly the many memories that are today resurfacing. Time's cyclic sweep has reduced a nearly five-decade chasm to many meaningful memory promptings from which emerge pictures and faces and events and instances that have taken on new life.

Those reflections also caused me to think about friendship. It has been said that soldiers should never develop close friendships; losing a friend in battle is a bitterness. I can remember thinking that perhaps my friendships with the men of the 41st

were fragile and fleeting. But "our" war has long been won, way has led to way, reunions have taken place. The fragile friendship, as a concept, has been given the lie.

My scanty--much too scanty--notes scribbled on my cruise home included a digest of my career in the 41st. That career, in a nutshell, could best be described as "average," that is, if there is such a thing as an average career in combat aviation. Patrolling, strafing, dive bombing, reconnaissance, bomber cover were all parts of my experience. Some milk runs were included. And then there were those "hairy" flights that brought sweat to the brow, emptiness to the gut, and pucker to the anus. Because one's memory is the echo of the once seen, the once experienced, I can vividly relive such events as getting shot up by the navy, the United States Navy; flying through that schoolhouse in Mangalden (haunting enough to make me become a school teacher?); getting plastered with twenty-two holes from small arms fire while on a strafing mission and still flying home in a plane that played like a finely-tuned concert grand. One hundred missions, a zero downed, two caught on the ground, flying wing to flying lead, new guy to old hand--average or not, I had a feeling that I had contributed just a little to the total war effort. More importantly, I felt that I had been a cog in a smooth-functioning machine, the 41st Fighter Squadron.

Then, too, the 41st had its tribulations, something to be expected in a war zone. The squadron had its disasters, usually considered to be the loss of one its pilots and which always deeply and emotionally affected the entire group. But the 41st was a hardy outfit made of stern stuff so that it simply absorbed its disasters, muffled them with its sense of mission and continued on knowing that there would always be another disaster. It was part of the life.

My cruise continued as I was eastered ever closer to the States. We were beyond the Hawaiian Islands and had long ceased the drunken, staggering pattern that a ship makes in submarine

avoidance tactics. Even though time's arrow points only one way, my thoughts often drifted back to the Philippines and the outfit. Were the missions going well? Were those Mustangs living up to their promise? (What a fine airplane!) And most of all, how were all the guys? No wonder that I had experienced that strange ambivalence, brief though it was, about leaving the 41st. I had developed a deep bond of affection for the men of the old outfit, and they rose up to grace my thoughts in insistent, persistent ways--they were integrally woven into the patterns of my thinking, part of me forever.

The Golden Gate Bridge was eventually reached, and my cruise coursed beneath it. Almost a year-and-a-half ago I had flown over it as a passenger on a C-54. Much had happened in my life between those two sightings of the Bridge. The first sighting was the outward bound beginning of my South Pacific odyssey. The second sighting meant that I was home, that I had come full circle through a course mined with peril yet fraught with rewards. "Home alive in forty-five" was, at last, not just a trite rhyme. It was a reality.

Survivor's Guilt

Predictability can be grim. Back in the war years of the forties, one of the givens of life was that some servicemen would not return, that some 41st Fighter Squadron men would not return. Grim predictability. But in trolling the gray reaches of my mind and recall, not returning was an idea we did not dwell upon very much, if at all. Yet death, the starkest fact of life, happened. Even though the men of the 41st mastered the complexities of their swift planes and took them expertly and confidently to war, death happened. War's crucible took lives, and we who were spared might have understandably wondered, "Why him and not me?" This wondering might continue during reflective moments even today.

"Why him and not me?" is a quantum leap question at this point in our lives, and answering it after so many years can result in a quasi-guilt, persistent and ineradicable, animating our memories of a Tedeschi, a Scotty, a Walcott, a Devins, a host of others. In the face of a tragic 41st loss we may have displayed a breezy insouciance about that loss which belied our true heartfelt reactions. We did care--deeply--but we had to go on. Insouciance was a coverup for our inarticulateness, a coverup toward the favoring part chance played in our lives. (Chance smiled at many of us.)

Think back. So many were taken from us, young men in their prime who held promise, had intelligence, earned esteem, exuded vitality, displayed potential. Just not fair. But no one expected "fair" to be a part of what we were about: fighting a war. Until our tours of duty were completed--either through orders home or through death--we were reluctant, in a way, to abandon the arena; and we knew that still more would be taken from us. But if we survived, it was a nicely bittersweet thought that was a simple yet lucky fact. Back then, and even today, it was easy to be more comfortable with simplicities than with daunting complexities. Still, the "Why him and not me?" syndrome can well up to stir the heart and waylay the mind.

41st FIGHTER SQUADRON

Savannah Reunion ~ 1993

Savannah, Georgia
Reunion '93, April

To the 41st'ers,

In some mysterious way those old and new 41st memories seduce me into setting them down, views of and from the past that haunt and waylay the senses. So the years, in some strange way, have kept their watches wound; the ticking takes me backward with as much certainty as it moves me forward. The thing is, none of these memories could have survived without the impulse to pass on a good story, to attempt to record some of the fringe aspects, to enable my children and grandchildren to have a viewpoint of what went on back in the early 1940's, to provide a personal perspective of World War II for my fellow reunionees.

All of these 41st memories translate into subjective pieces of self-indulgence; that is what you are getting if you take time to read these offerings: self-indulgence. What you are getting may be slanted versions of topics and thoughts, but my slants are at least set to paper. Maybe another fifty years hence they will be read again so that WW II will be seen as more than just a chapter in a history book; it will be seen as a very experientially human era.

For the last five reunions--Colorado Springs, San Antonio, Reno, New Orleans, and now Savannah--I have prepared and offered selected thoughts and recollections for your consideration. This offering will probably be the final one. I hope these writings have meant something to you. They have to me because they are evidence of an impact that began fifty years ago with WW II and my own inclusion in the 41st Fighter Squadron story.

Blue skies,

Dick DeBaugh

We Remember

For fifty years no sun has set on Jeanes; Scotty has not walked among falling leaves; no winter snows have touched Walcott; Wedemeyer has not heard the songs of birds. For fifty years. Because you died so young, Jeanes, Scotty, Walcott, Wedemeyer, and all the rest of you who flew that ultimate mission, you were denied life's largesse. For those of us who are still a part of life's push, who take so much for granted, who have experienced that broad range of years, we think about you. We remember losing you and the cause to which you gave your life. We remember the friendship that bonded us and gave strength to our squadron. We remember your devotion to duty which gave you stature and standing among us. Fifty years? Such a breadth of time! Yet your being, your manner, your faces remain with us. You remain with us and still touch us. After fifty years, you still touch us. And we remember.

New in New Guinea

I had been in New Guinea about a week and in the 41st Fighter Squadron for about three days. A few sketchy and disjointed notes are all that I have of that first week, that first week when I was new in New Guinea and had already developed such a strong sense of atmosphere about the place, the kind of sense that could be one of the bases for a book. Sketchy or not, those old notes can conjure up mind pictures of New Guinea that take on captions such as "Island of Doubt" and "Satan's Refuge" and "Study in Dread." At first, I felt like a wanderer in the jungle of apprehension, but I emerged from that jungle after adjusting to the fact that I would be in New Guinea for a goodly chunk of my life and would soon cease being new in New Guinea.

As an aside, those above-mentioned notes appear to be spotted and stained. While I might have cried tears over being in New Guinea, I rather think they are careless spatters of Old Overholt Rye which some forgotten 41st'er forced upon me in an arcane ceremony dubbed, "Get the New Boy Soused." Indeed, in honest reflection, it must be said, those spatters were not of tears; the South Pacific was my theater of choice immediately after December 7, 1941.

In traveling to New Guinea, I didn't change time zones so much as leave them altogether. It's as though I lapsed into a kind of disconnected state because of the absence of a civilization that might be termed familiar. Life as I knew it receded to an abstraction; in its place came enveloping stickiness, predictable rains, confrontations with crawly things, living in a goddamned tent, flying off in an airplane intending to hurt and damage and kill and become an iceberg. (Remember that old wartime metaphor? Look upon the Japanese as the Titanic. Then root for the iceberg.) A part of the trouble was that the brass never handled New Guinea in the right way. The first thing that should have been done was to build a couple of golf courses. While that might have created a "cause celebre" at home, it would have given New Guinea something "worth fighting for."

I eventually felt New Guinea out--I soon became old in New Guinea--to the degree that Morotai amounted to a highlight that deadened my earlier island angst. But not too many of those first miles, not too many of those first hours into the New Guinea experience, I began to think of the journey as a real-life novel-in-progress. The only trouble was, I couldn't figure what kind of a novel it was going to be. Weird? Funny? Valorous? Tragic? Happy ending? All of the above? It would take the full journey to determine that, and the title would write itself. The tempo, the pace of the novel would certainly change from the previous year when in cadet and fighter training schools my existence had been structured to life on the run. No matter how the story developed, the first pages would hold themes of quandary and wonderment.

The setting for the story--incredible! Thunderstorms, churning and truculent; sunsets, sumptuous in their drapery; panoramas, stunning combinations of mountains, rivers, islands, oceans, forests--all overwhelming in their color and dimension. At the time of being new in New Guinea, the grandiose setting for my story escaped me in the excitement of being assigned to the 41st Fighter Squadron, a real honest-to-God outfit flying combat missions. But the "newness" impact was there. Although subtle, that impact would later emerge and cement itself in my memory as the backdrop of my story's first chapters.

Vocabularies are not rich enough to detail and animate the many characters of my novel. Peopled with an amazing array of men who were new in my life, my book--and I--would become blessed with their being, their energetic worth, their purposefulness. These men would be the essence of my story, the part of deepest significance. Together, we would forge an association of men bonded by the fact of a wartime experience, a way of life and living that said, "I trust you." When I was new in New Guinea, when I was imbued with its primeval atmosphere, when I was thrust into a kind of living that gave no omen of its mind-stretching richness, I can now look back upon those early days with appreciation, those days that start my story. The sad part is that it took a war to bring them about.

Change

There was a single and similar change in all of us as we served in the 41st Fighter Squadron, as we were caught up in the war, as we were absorbed by history: we got older. Naturally, getting older was something we did not want to miss; sadly, we remember many who stopped ageing and who will forever remain young. Looking back to the early 1940's, there seemed to be a South Pacific fixity of mountains, of oceans, of islands, of forests. But not of people. Nothing changed but the people. What we men of the 41st saw, did, and felt will continue to cast shadows, benign or sorrowful, over us. The experience changed us.

Change, especially when it happens to oneself, is usually imperceptible. We did not stop to think about change, but being there--in the South Pacific and in the 41st--allowed us room to grow, to explore, to discourse, to suffer, to change. We were no longer kids, no longer innocents as we moved from youthful vibrancy to jaded nonchalance. We became seasoned by war and our experiences. How could one not change? Yet we never thought about change or the influence the wartime environment might exert upon us. We didn't think about it, but did the folks at home wonder about us and how we would be when we returned?

The Return

He went, and he was gay to go;
And I smiled on him as he went.
My son--'twas well he couldn't know
My darkest dread, nor what it meant--

Just what it meant to smile and smile
And let my son go cheerily--
My son . . . and wondering all the while
What stranger would come back to me.

Wilfrid Wilson Gibson

Perhaps those at home wondered about change even if we did not--wondered "What stranger would come back to me." Sacrifice

and a closer kinship with his fellow man can change a man so that he is stronger, finer, surer of himself, and more sensitized to home and family. Without question, a few among us had a sobering awareness about personal change; although home may not have changed, they had. Adjustments were ahead. Whatever war does to its survivors, it cuts emotional and nervous channels that are hard to fill in the aftermath. When you received those cherished orders to go home, you might have felt lucky. You might have felt spared. But in that happy moment, did you feel that you had changed? The lessons of war were not lost on us. They brought to flower those beliefs and strengths within us that made us feel equal to each confrontation and situation, made "going home" a successful step in life.

Placing the self in the stream of natural change, our 41st days wrought changes within us. The demands of wartime tasks, camp life, flying missions, our spirit, the occasional crush of ennui, simply living through that mosaic of misery, having one's life touched by such fine people--how could one not change? And so we flew, we excelled as aviators, we met full force the demands of our jobs, we faced the gamut of war's emotions, we forged friendships of lasting loyalties. Some greater power favored us and returned us to our homes. But we were changed.

Final Mission

Talking about it, writing about it, and, most of all, thinking about it uncountable times have given it permanence in my mind. My final mission as a 41st Fighter Squadron pilot has haunted my thoughts and imprinted my being since that memorable day, April 2, 1945.

The 41st was flying out of Mangalden, Lingayan Gulf, Luzon, in the spring of 1945. We had been flying support missions for the Army ground forces, strafing and dive bombing. Also, we would take on those more distant flights that took us out on fighter sweeps, bomber cover, and dive bombing missions north to Formosa. My final mission was a dive bombing flight to Formosa, to where there was a railroad hub that continued as a useful adjunct to enemy operations. The assignment to hit this target devolved upon the 41st; I was to lead a twelve-ship flight to reach the target, bomb it, and return to Mangalden. Simple enough. Some of us who were old hands had some initial misgivings about the mission. Considering all that went into a mission, taking off with two wing tanks and a 280 pound fragmentation belly bomb seemed barely worth the effort. But no matter; a mission was a mission, straight down from Fighter Command.

We took off. A 41st Fighter Squadron flight of twelve ships, proud pilots airborne in planes adorned with blazonry and insignia, was engaged in another mission in the progression of the war. The trip north was smooth; weather CAVU, all aircraft functioning, 10,000 feet of altitude. One hour and forty-five minutes into the flight Formosa rose up like a ship on the horizon. With a small course adjustment to effect a flyover of a small island of the Pescadores group off the west coast of Formosa, we headed for this key point, reached it, and then flew due east to our target. Within minutes we were over Formosa and nearly to the railroad center. Antiaircraft fire was visible ahead but not tracking us effectively. Then, over the target and first in line, tanks dropped, armament switches on, I began my dive. Things looked good as I bore down on those tracks while hurling bursts of my fifties to repress Japanese ground fire. Suddenly, things

became squeamishly uncomfortable as tracer fire came at me--close, over my wings, past my canopy. I was flying down into a maelstrom, a concentration of enemy fury. I sensed that I had taken some hits. Although I had felt nothing distinct enough to be sure, there was that evocation of the special relationship which exists between a pilot and his plane that made me sense the taking of hits.

Even so, I safely cleared the area and looked back with satisfaction that all twelve ships had cleared and, importantly, that the bombing had been effective. We formed up quickly for the ride home; my plane seemed to respond normally, and instrumentation readings were on the mark as we gained altitude to 10,000 feet. The weather continued to be favorable, and the homeward leg of the mission was underway. I should have been comfortable with the situation. Pilots should not be concerned with forebodings; premonitions were lunacies to be avoided. But these persisted, lurked in my mind. Even though my twelve-ship flight eventually reached Lingayen Gulf, ten minutes from touch-down, now at 1,000 feet of altitude, a safe conclusion to the mission at last seemed assured. And then it happened!

My cockpit suddenly filled with smoke along with a choking, eye-watering, gagging stench which was quickly alleviated when I put on my oxygen mask. The engine still appeared to be running smoothly, but nothing electrical functioned. My radio was dead. Just minutes from landing, my wingman was able to get my hand-signalled message to clear us for touch-down; he called the tower and then gave me the Roger sign to take the squadron on in. Perhaps my worry about premonitions had been baseless. Just another "Jug" landing and all would be well.

This time, however, instead of the usual tight 360 pattern I made a gentle thing of it, a broader, shallower turn. Lining up my approach at about 100 feet, near the end of the runway, flaps set, wheels down, this would be a grease job, simply smooth it in. But it was not to be. A C-47 had pulled out on the runway, a red light <u>and</u> a flare from the tower! The message was clear; pull 'er up and go around, try it a second time. Full throttle, reset the prop pitch, up with the wheels, try again.

Damn! The reality of a certain crash immediately hit me when there was no surge of power. Even so, my training kicked in--the most important being that which was self-imposed, training wherein I had pictured myself in every possible direful emergency and then mentally reacting in response. This was just such an emergency, and throughout the next few seconds I did what I could in response to my situation. I was able to maintain altitude over the length of the runway, barely above stalling speed, wheels supposedly coming up, trying to "shift gears" by using the manual prop pitch control for the Curtiss electric propeller, attempting to "think" my way to safety. Nothing worked. The inevitable crash was at hand. Then I hit.

I woke up in the hospital, a nearby Army medical installation. First, I remember being apprised of my physical condition. I had been amazingly fortunate: nothing broken, no cuts, many bruises and abrasions, a slight concussion. One of the ironies of the crash is that while I was in the crucible of it, I heard none of its sound and fury--I was unconscious after one of my shoulder straps broke and I had been wrenched forward striking my head on the gunsight. Then I learned of the accident itself, an incredible thing to live through.

As I lost altitude, a turn at stalling speed would have been a certain death warrant so I continued straight ahead, straight toward the town of Mangalden which was a mile away and directly in line with the airstrip. I had crashed through a schoolhouse (no pupils present), which was on one side of the town square. Momentum had taken me on into the middle of the square stopping in front of a statue of some famous Philippine figure. A wing had been left in the school house, the engine has been wrenched loose, and the plane caught fire. I was told that some heroic GIs had pulled me from the wreckage. As it later developed, I realized that faithful old #172 and I had called it quits together.

To this day, my sense is that it was the "Jug" that saved me. The outfit was in its transition period to the Mustangs at the time. There is no doubt that the P-51 would not have seen me through the crash. How lucky can a guy be!

The Older Guys

The Older Guys--an affectionate term--refers to anybody who was in the outfit before your own arrival as a 41st'er and has nothing at all to do with age chronology. But there was something about them, a near mythic tradition. Parsons, Farrar, Fariello, Park, Alder: they were charismatic as individuals. Get them in a group and they could be spellbinding; collectively, they could offer the listener bullshit or philosophy or both in combination. Philosophically, they all seemed to be humanists as, to a man, they nontheistically adhered (in the bravado of their talk) to the concept that they were able to function in wartime and achieve a warrior's man-centered self-fulfillment. As pros, they relied on themselves and their own capabilities and, of course, each other. They did not need, one could infer, the hand of God to aid them. Who knows, however, what they thought in their private moments?

Dellinger, K. Brown, Lundberg, Jamie Wallace--what a grand set of names! What a grand set of personalities to go with those names! Back in the early 1940's, each and every one seemed a distinct presence within the squadron. Rarities that they were, all of the Older Guys are representations of the many who were in the outfit whose times as 41st Fighter Squadron members preceded mine. Typically, all of those great names that are unsaid here receive a kind of honor and esteem through the 41st association.

Rouse, Mugavero, John Wallace, Rowell--I flew with all of them. All those named herein were there when I joined the 41st. So often, they would personify grace at the controls to the degree that I felt as though I would simply sit and steer the plane instead of fly it. Those Older Guys, their personalities were revealed in their piloting techniques as they performed the artful and the accomplished while repulsing the leaden and the dull.

In the air, on the ground, with visible aplomb and splashy insouciance, those Older Guys provided lessons and learning. To live with them, to fly with them was to know the highest good and allowed me to revel in an unforced surrender to sentiment and wisdom and experience.

Interlude

A feminine voice! Although soft and delicate, the voice was distinctly heard, angelically heaven sent, a crystal departure from the throaty bass and baritone grunts and growls that had been my listening life for three months. A feminine voice! Not a record or a radio signal laden with a Ginny Simms or a Tokyo Rose sound, but a real live female voice saying words that were a carol. A feminine voice! God, the lilt of that sound--a listening impression that has remained with me through these many years of life's greedy push.

The scene was a small tent-like structure neighboring the flight-line operations shack at Biak Island. Midday. A few of us were returning from Port Moresby ferrying P-47's, a fuel stop on the way to Morotai. Waiting for the planes to be serviced, I took a stroll around, headed for the ops shack. At the instant of entry, I was forced to pause, then, to stop. Momentarily, I was stopped by a sound. It was that voice, and I tracked it to that small tent. The voice belonged to a Red Cross girl. Or woman. Or angel. She was dispensing doughnuts and coffee to transients, Biak passers-by and passers-through. How ordinary! As a moment arrested permanently in time, I remember her uniformed trimness, the slash of red that was her mouth, the smile that she lavished on all whom she served. I cannot remember the taste of that doughnut or the wash of that coffee as I tried to suppress my wanton stare. She was good at her task, a repetitious cadence of pour and smile and serve, again and again. She moved with the silky grace of a Pavlova; her femininity worked for her so that she was softly seductive even though she didn't know it, didn't know that her demeanor had the appeal that would attract. It was a delightful interlude that began with the sound of her voice.

Life's interludes can be revisited and relived through emotion. An "emotion recollected in tranquillity" is eminently real even though but a recapturing of an instant out of the past. Recollecting that feminine voice stimulates a backward journey, and I become a voyeur into my own past.

SNAFU

"SNAFU" is without doubt the most common and most famous acronym to emerge from the vocabulary of World War II. It was omnipresent, being used to refer to anything that did not go right, measure up, or prove satisfactory. It was a good term as it zeroed in on the core of the problem; and it could be voiced with the disgust and vehemence of a curse, with stoic disregard, or with a carefree smile and flip attitude. Because of its limitless application, SNAFU took life in those war years as the handiest and most easily understood term ever concocted and is still an accepted part of our language, a term that is listed in every modern dictionary. SNAFU (situation normal, all fouled up--it does have variations) is an armed forces contribution to the expressiveness of the English language.

In the 41st Fighter Squadron, the term SNAFU was heard often in the course of camp life and service life in general. It also was a term that was used as a referent to a flying situation--to abort was to SNAFU. Occasion would demand that a pilot turn back or abort a mission due to a problem with his plane. While Thumper and his crews (being one-half mechanical genius and one-half Swiss army knife they could do anything) normally prevented SNAFUS through good maintenance, they nevertheless occurred. Oil leaks, rough engines, hydraulic troubles were all listed among the many glitches that caused a pilot to SNAFU. Turning back from a mission was never pleasant; the pilot who did so knew that he was robbing the squadron of some of its strength. And the men on the ground felt equally bad, but the risk in continuing a mission in a questionable airplane was never worth the possible dire price. Given the mechanical and electrical complexities within a sixteen-ship flight, SNAFUS were inevitable. The causes of SNAFUS were varied, some of them gremlin-like in their utter mysteriousness.

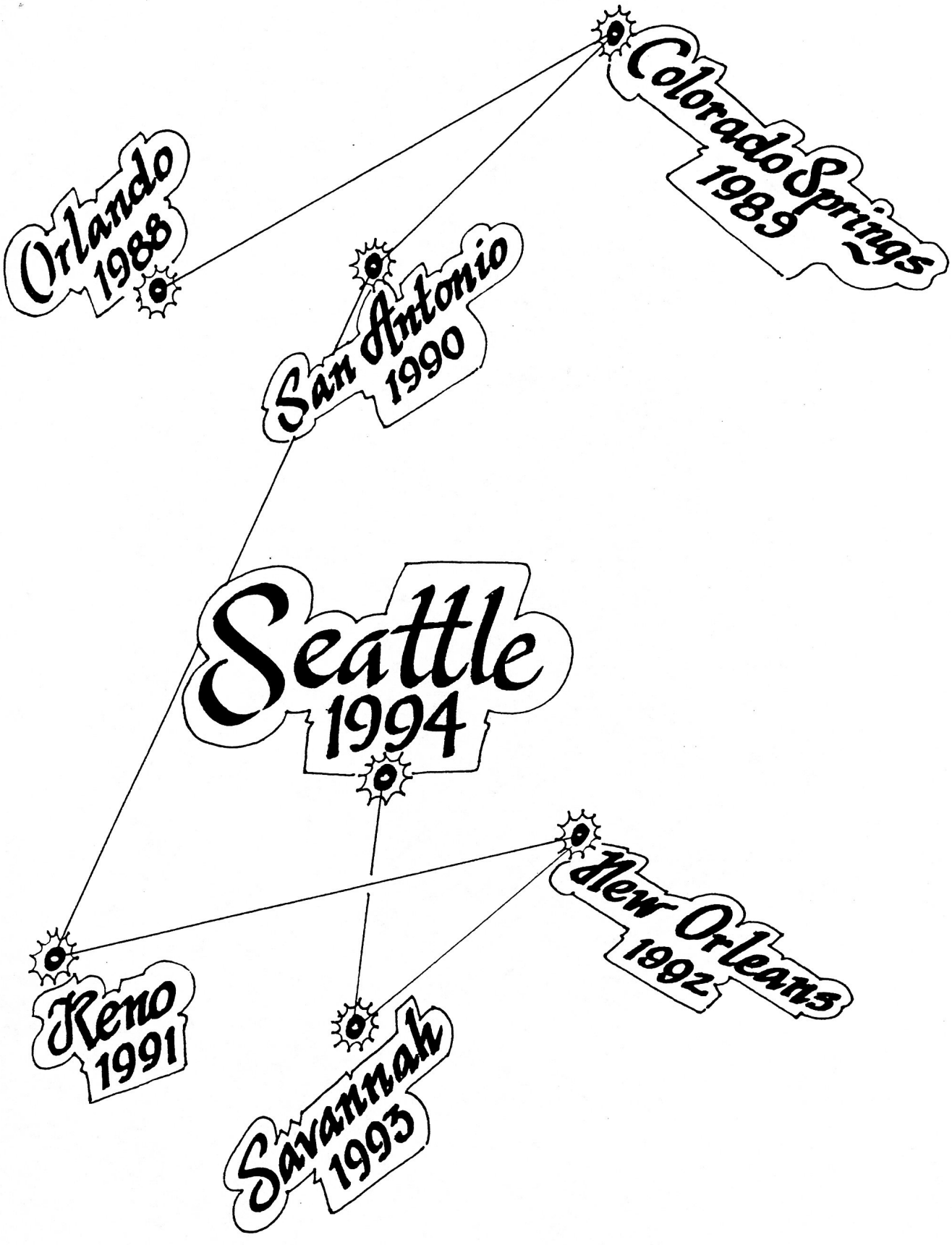
Then, too, there were other causes. More than one 41st'er suffered an attack of the 'runs' which necessitated a high speed

race for home. Occasionally, the race was lost. And an archival record tells of Socks Johnson who had to SNAFU because he forgot his oxygen mask. Joe Burnett, of the caustic and searing wit, is credited with a memorable quote to one pilot who had SNAFUED, "What happened, did your clock stop?"

Did a pilot ever not SNAFU a few miles out from base when he should have? Probably. We'll never know. Assuredly, there were pilots who kept flying, who did not wish to let down the rest of the guys, who desired to maintain squadron integrity, and took the risk. One can never call to question the judgment of a hero. To SNAFU or not to SNAFU was a weighty decision for a fighter pilot because the temptation to continue a mission was so paramount in his mind. Indeed, such a decision could be so ultimate, so fundamental, so fateful that it brings to mind the old adage about there being two kinds of people: fighter pilots and everyone else.

On a personal note, I turned back only one time. Ten minutes north out of Morotai my windscreen became blackened with oil, a king-sized leak. A SNAFU was the only possible action. In landing, I stuck my head out to the side hoping to get a better angle on the strip. What I got was a snootful of oil and useless goggles. My SNAFU was the right move.

A facetious proposition exists known as Murphy's Law; it states that if there is a possibility for something to go wrong, it will. Murphy's Law might partially undergird and explain the concept of the SNAFU. Just remember, the military has no priority on the SNAFU, noun; or the SNAFU situation, adjective; or a tendency to SNAFU the works, verb. Always pointed, ever useful, never reduced to a cliché, the term SNAFU has application to all of life.


Colorado Springs
1989
Orlando
1988
San Antonio
1990
Seattle
1994
New Orleans
1992
Reno
1991
Savannah
1993

Richard DeBaugh
903 East South Street
Knoxville, Illinois 61448

Seattle Reunion
May, 1994

To My 41st Friends,

Against the passage of time, memory and perception can become skewed. Even so, remembering is important. Even though you feel like you have one foot in the 1940s and the other foot in the 1990s, remembering is important. What we did and how we lived fifty years ago overseas is important, vitally so. In setting down a few memories of those overseas days, I have attempted to give substance to the phrase, "remembering is important." The things remembered are important because those things are a part of the 41st story, worth setting to paper for 41st'ers to think about and for others to become aware, aware of how it was and the way we were. One of the glories of the 41st Fighter Squadron is its sustaining quality, its ability to "last." Part of my intention in writing and offering these remembrances is to help along that sustaining quality.

Although I once wrote of my intention to cease indulging in thinking back, I continued to be inflicted by more ideas. So I had to set them down for my children and grandchildren. And for you, my 41st friends.

Because these writings are out of my personal recall, and because I occasionally lapsed into that reflective state essential for dredging up moments of yesteryear, these reminiscences have the unabashed voice of memoir which, I would like to think, ache on the page like an exposed nerve. May you enjoy this reading.

Blue skies,

Dick DeBaugh

We Still Remember

If there are no stone and mortar memorials to the 41st Fighter Squadron, at least let there be memory. World War II was a monumental national experience. To that national experience, each 41st'er can add his own personal experience, part of which is ineradicably set in the mind. What is set in the 41st mind is the memory of lost friends. Today, fifty years after the loss of those friends, the memory of them still brings a visceral response that resonates with longing and wondering. Pride and honor throb through us as we still remember our old--yet forever young--friends who brought us that pride and that honor fifty years ago just as they do today. To have known them, to have flown with them, to have been friends with them--all are part of memory's residual effects of those associations. Our lost friends were important to us then, they are important to us now. Yes, we still remember.

Balikpapan

Many benchmark dates exist in the history of the 41st Fighter Squadron. On July 15, 1942, the outfit moved into the Port Moresby area and established itself as an active combat force. At the war's end, after August of 1945, the 41st moved into Japan itself as part of the occupation forces. Between these two dates many highlights shine with 41st luster, many dates reflect 41st distinctions for the squadron as a whole and for individuals who claimed the spotlight. Two dates in the 41st saga are significant: October 10 and 14, 1944, the raids on Balikpapan. Attrition was the watchword as the 41st flew cover for heavy bombers to Balikpapan, a well-protected enemy oil bastion of the east coast of Borneo and a one-way flight of 800 miles.

Balikpapan. When we learned of this mission and as the very detailed briefings took place, excitement grew and expectancy prevailed. This was to be the longest fighter mission to date in the Pacific war. The 41st became energized, uplifted by positive attitudes, and eager to acquit itself not only with stick and rudder skills but also with the confidence that many months of combat would bring. As for the 41st'ers who went on those missions to Borneo, each would have his own memorable gallery of images. I can recall some of my own images.

Balikpapan was an audacious undertaking that was a most forthright upper echelon decision, a decision predicated on the seen need to render a crushing blow to the enemy's ability to produce oil for its war machine. Yes, it was audacious; and the 41st flew those two missions with an audacity that was coupled with caution and resourcefulness. Our intent was to be a vital cog in the Fifth Air Force mission of inflicting murderous agony on Balikpapan and its defenders.

The Balikpapan briefings were, expectedly, detailed and far-reaching. I recall that time and those briefings as an animated sequence of sights and sounds that went beyond the

normal routine of so many previous missions. This time, we experienced nuances and hints of something new, a departure from what had gone on before, a mission to verify our capabilities; yet the push of our professionalism outdistanced the rush of excitement.

All of the usual things were covered in preparation for the raids on Balikpapan. Extensive weather information was given; weather was always a vital concern as we knew from past experiences. Target data were explained and emphasized. Balikpapan defenses were delineated through word and photograph; many batteries of anti-aircraft guns were in place although the bomber force was expected to bear the brunt of this enemy action. Enemy fighter planes were anticipated to rise in defense of their refinery installation. As on all our escort missions, the fighter plane to bomber plane nexus was that the fighters help the bombers to bomb more effectively. So the mission also became an attempt to "sweep" enemy fighter aircraft from the skies--a fighter sweep, so-called. The thorough briefings continued: navigation, sea rescue services, rendezvous matters, fuel consumption, altitude, pilot personnel, tactics--all mission relevancies were covered minutely as never before. The 41st took to the air well-prepared; I felt well-prepared to undertake the first Balikpapan mission of October 10, 1944.

Flying wing that day, my memory congeals about certain aspects; on others, the images focus. Rising to 20,000 feet on a 260 degree vector, I recall passing over the Molucca Sea, past Manado, crossing the northwestern crescent of the Celebes, overflying the Makassar Straits, then looking down upon Balikpapan with a blackening smoke-laden pall erupting from the carnage of well-placed bombs--a satisfying sight and evidence that the "heavies" knew their business and etched in my mind as fit retribution for Pearl Harbor, Corregidor, and Bataan.

Suddenly, cruel disappointment! My flight turned homeward, a move dictated by the flight leader's fuel supply. One of my most vivid images of recall--it remains with me to this

day--was looking down and actually sighting Japanese fighter aircraft taking off, seeing some of them in the air and being engaged by other Fifth Air Force fighters. And we were heading for home! Retrospectively, it was a disappointment not to be a part of the air action, but turning back was wise. Some members of my flight reached our home base of Morotai dangerously low on fuel after diverting around weather build-ups, over eight and a half hours after takeoff. For me, an irony was that I landed with over 100 gallons of fuel, enough to have closed with enemy aircraft.

The second Balikpapan flight, October 14, 1944, was also a successful operation, the virtual knock-out punch. Aerial photographic overflights showed that effective bombing occurred on both raids and that Japanese refining capabilities had been significantly damaged, a true war production wound. In addition to the extensive refinery damage, history books reveal that over sixty enemy aircraft were downed on the two Balikpapan raids, ten of these by 41st Fighter Squadron pilots. The following data are taken from the Squadron History for October.

> Balikpapan, located on the southeast coast of Borneo, holds a merited position of high importance to the Japs. Earlier in the war it was used by the AAF as a base during the withdrawal from Java and the Philippines, and many of the facilities were destroyed at that time. During the intervening time the Nips have worked long and hard in restoring Balikpapan, and it was reputed to be contributing 65% of the refined oil products produced in the Netherlands East Indies area. In pre-war days its producing capacity was about 30% of the total produced, but after the fields and refineries were destroyed the job of supplying aviation gasoline, greases, oils, etc. was thrust upon Balikpapan due to necessity. In addition to their oil production, other industries such as ship building, mining, and agriculture have been developed to a high degree. Other data about the Balikpapan raids:
>
> | | |
> |---|---|
> | Distance: | Longest strike on record for the 41st, 1800 miles. |
> | Time: | 8 hours 15 minutes actual flying time. |
> | Participants: | 5 Heavy Bombardment Groups: 43rd, 22nd, 90th, and two Groups from the 13th Air Force; 112 B-24s. Fighters: 56 P-47s and P-38s. |
> | Enemy Losses: | 60 Jap aircraft destroyed by fighters and bombers. |
> | Interception: | An estimated 60 to 70 Jap fighters intercepted, interception lasting 50 minutes for both raids. |
> | Our Losses: | 1 P-47 lost. P-38s not known. 4 B-24s were lost, 1 was rammed by a Nip, 3 were destroyed due to fighters and combination of A/A and aerial bombs. |
> | Bombing: | Excellent by all Groups. Area engulfed in smoke and flames, smoke to 18,000 feet and visible for 100 miles. |

The Balikpapan raids were among the most ambitious endeavors against the enemy in the Pacific war. For the 41st, the raids have never been forgotten, permanently etched as highlights in squadron lore. Many of us sense that the raids should be dedicated to the memory of Raymond "Weeds" Wiedmeyer, friend, comrade in arms, perfectionist pilot, the lone 41st'er who was lost over Balikpapan, lost in the act of saving his element leader from a closing enemy plane.

In looking back at the Balikpapan instances, I sense that I am wandering into a parallel universe, that I am again young with a kind of "can do" vibrancy, that I am ensconced in a fifty-years-past time warp, that I am associating with talented young men to whom squadron integrity was the ultimate good. And today, it all makes me realize that Balikpapan--and all of those 41st days--was a time when we had such powerful perspective on our lives that our motives sang to us loud and clear. Importantly, we understood exactly what those motives were and what they meant. Out of time's capsule, Balikpapan was significant to the 41st and its men, part of the richness of our mutual past.

God and the 41st

No doubt about it. We men of the 41st Fighter Squadron were not a gathering of saints. Nor were we saintly. While we were a fraternity of young men who grew close in the commonality of purpose, who were an exultation of larks as we pursued our assigned missions, who were conditioned to kill and destroy as we attempted to save our asses, some of us did, on occasion, turn to a higher being for a bit of succor, solace, and strength. As I recall, these turns were seldom overt; but who knows what a man will do when lights-out comes, when he is alone with his thoughts, when he inwardly grapples with Satan?

Personally, I know that I asked an occasional indulgence from Him, but I count myself as a spiritual imposter as most of my dealings with the Almighty seemed to be on the level of negotiations rather than lordly homage. I had a praying talent that was more green than ripe. Maybe it was this way with other Buzz Sawyers. And no conscious regrets from all of this. Being young and, of course, immortal, many of us were somewhat spiritually flip. Then, too, war is not an observer of the Sabbath, and just as well. Not too many of us would have attended services anyway. The Padres had much sermonic material--the need was there--but at least the throaty cadences of our Pratt-Whitneys offered us the kind of psalmodic quietude that bordered spirituality. It was a kind of churchly music.

We might have called on Him because of our quandary. While not wishing to pass a moral judgment on the ways of mankind, the war was, for some of us, just another baffling manifestation of civilization's headlong plunge into the abyss. But what could we do? We were caught up in this malevolence that took fine young men from our circle. Our bafflement was understandable, but we lived through it all and laughed and joked and partied and reviewed the war in the same sense that pigeons review statues. Many of us would have agreed with the old saying,

"All God's religions . . . have not been able to put mankind back together again."

Naturally, we 41st'ers coped and carried on. We served and waited for the grail of tour's end. Grails, like comedy and love, are where you find them. Orders to go home to the States were a kind of grail that many never found. Praying or not praying probably had nothing to do with it, but that is beside the point. Luck had a lot to do with it, luck and being raw and mean and close to the burner had a lot to do with it. Even so, there were those--more power to them--who undoubtedly felt that God was at their shoulder and in their heart. Surely, a good deal of self-discovery transpired in the cockpit as well as on that alien soil. That life is an endless process of self-discovery is right; we learned much about ourselves. One of the things we realized is that not having the sixth sense of prescience was to our advantage. What was to be our lot on the morrow was better left to discovery.

Nevertheless, prayer was an option. Practicing a religion was an option. Some prayed, some practiced, some ignored, some thought about it. When we partied, we would often be in our cups and sing ribald limricks, but never the following more thoughtful one:

> God's plan made a hopeful beginning,
> But man spoiled his chance by sinning.
> We trust that the story
> Will end in God's glory
> But, at present, the other side's winning.

In his great military poem "Tommy," Rudyard Kipling wrote that

> Single men in barracks don't
> grow into plaster saints.

Although our barracks were tents and we were very human rather than being plaster saints, there can be no doubt about it. We men of the 41st were not a gathering of saints even though we often tried to make a quiet place out of a maelstrom, even though we knew of death's sting.

To that, one might say, "Amen."

The Inadvertence of Heroism

In my life I have never dealt with people who have built bridges or empires, who have played center field for the Yankees, who have held astronaut rating, or who have led spectacularly acclaimed lives. To put it tersely, I have not been associated with heroes as we conventionally assume heroes to be. However, upon reflection I now realize that I have been associated with heroes of a very special status. An account of these heroes would simply be a depiction of the 41st Fighter Squadron at any time during its life overseas.

Back in our flying days with the 41st I doubt that any of us thought about becoming heroes. Yet there are heroes among us. I flew with you so I know. Of course, we can't all be heroes; somebody has to sit on the curb and clap as heroes go by, as Will Rogers once said. None of us set out on a course charted toward heroic laurels and the winning of acclaim. In spite of this, heroism is a part of the 41st story.

Heroism was thrust upon us when chance happened to put us in the right place at the right time. Did that happen to you when you got that Nip? When on one of those target of opportunity missions you strafed that particularly juicy target? When you took your flight home through that ugly and threatening tropical storm? Such occasions demanded that we act and react with cool savvy, that we perform heroically while our subconscious selves said, "What the hell; this is what I'm supposed to do." It was inadvertent heroism.

Back in our hey-day in the Pacific, and if wishes could have begotten events, each of us would have met airborne enemy planes (according to my fractured memory) on every mission. These wishes might well have been a kind of heroism even if akin to being death wishes. When one is wishing, bravado is easy, heroism is easy. Still, the wishing was sincere with us. We really wanted to mix it up with the enemy in the air; not to become heroes, but to experience that inexplicable mystery of

combat that could make you dead or lucky or elated beyond words. Despite our cavalier attitude about our own mortality, heroism was thrust upon us, in degree. Like inevitable dawn trying to sneak past a rooster, heroism was unavoidable though inadvertent, though we did not seek it.

We were a coterie of splendid young men. We exhibited physical and mental courage in all of our missions, and that involved putting aside the perfectly normal instinct of fear. My guess is that nearly every man going into combat will, if pressed, confess to fear. Yet our fear was sublimated so that, instead, fearlessness consistently surfaced among the flyers of the 41st. We were competent and filled with pride in our outfit. When we climed into that cockpit, the plane simply became an extremity so that, man and machine as one, we flew expertly. Whether the mission was routine or precarious we flew expertly. Heroics and heroism did not get in our way; brave acts and superior aviating occurred, but their recognition could wait until later. Heroism was matter-of-fact; it just happened if it happened at all.

Memory becomes mushy and imprecise at times, but can you remember some of what we experienced? Of course, there was camp life; but there were also bombs and raking machine gun fire, fighter sweeps and patrol, bomber cover and ground support. At times, we might have wondered if we would ever live to be old (now, some of us wonder if we were ever young). We didn't think much about the next day in our kind of "carpé diem" existence, or that we were youthful champions of our nation's honor. History and global consequences weren't on our minds either. Our future was the next mission, the next scramble, the next target in our gunsights, the next landing, the next all-clear. While life seemed, at times, to move at the pace of continental drift, everything about that life presaged heroism or, at least, the potential for heroism. Still, it was not sought even though events and the accident of time and place thrust it upon us in

quirky inadvertence. Those of us who remain now are apt to appear as kindly-looking grandfathers, not as warriors and heroes.

Our 41st fraternity was forged in World War II (that's the war that sort of flickers on the screen), and heroism was there even if now dimmed by the mists of time. But I remember that heroism as an abiding, day-by-day, ever-present thing as we legitimized manly courage without even thinking about it. You could not help it; heroism happened to you in inadvertent ways. What an honor to be sitting here on the curb clapping and saluting as you 41st'ers go by!

A Milk Run, Sort Of

Noemfoor to Davao was a seven hundred mile overwater flight. The 41st Fighter Squadron mission for September 11, 1944, was to escort sixteen B-25 bombers to Davao--on the southeast corner of Mindanao--which were to bomb the Japanese-held airstrip and facilities there. Air opposition from enemy fighters was not expected, but the possibility always lurked; a pilot needed to have an alert and wary eye. Anti-aircraft action was definitely expected, but that would be the bugaboo of the B-25s.

Sixteen 41st planes were scheduled to take to the air on this escort job. A shadowy pall was cast over the operation at the outset when one of the planes crashed on takeoff; the pilot lost his life, another 41st point of tragedy to be accepted with stoic resignation. Fifteen P-47s continued and rendezvous was achieved with preciseness. The bombers planned to bomb from 10,000 feet. We in fighters weaved and shunted above them, ever alert to their safety. Our northwesterly vector was brightened by beautiful weather; west, north, east offered clear skies with unlimited visibility. Overhead, a breathtaking splash of blue favored the senses. A grand day for this type of mission. But to the south--far, far to the south--the weather was foreboding. Motionless in the distance hung massive dark clouds churning, we all knew, with violent power, burgeoning formations that were disquieting but no threat. Not yet.

The mission continued uneventfully. The flying was wonderful that day; the escort process was ideal. The B-25s flew a steady course, navigating with a certainty that took the entire flock of planes toward the rising mountain serrations of Mindanao, straight into Davao Gulf, and on to the target airstrip. The bombers turned on their bomb run, successfully challenged the sporadic and inaccurate ack-ack, bombed with precision, and turned to the southeast for the return journey to their Biak base, all the while being cuddled and babied along by the protective wings of the 41st Fighter Squadron.

Leaving the Philippine archipelago, the three-hour flight back to Noemfoor was easy and pleasant, so much so that one's thoughts could idly drift and wander:

(I wonder how that weather situation is developing south of Noemfoor. Sometimes weather builds and moves fast. Hope the problem stays away from base.)

(Damn, this plane is a sweet flying thing--a part of my subliminal life.)

(Weather. Well, it's good to be in a Jug if I have to be in weather. The Jug. As a plane, it never seems to be hosannaed like the 51 or the 38. Yet, it's answered every command the brass has made on it. Hell, it's answered every call I've made on it.)

(The 41st--good to be a part of it. Sure, there are other organizations. Storied squadrons, legendary pilots, reputation outfits, but the 41st performs admirably. With precision, integrity, confidence, and everyday doggedness. We get the job done; it's enough to ignite the spirit, inflame the imagination. Yeah, the 41st.)

(Hey, those B-25s are getting strung out; wish they'd snug up their formation. They could take a lesson from us. God, we look good; the 41st looks good.)

(Look at these guys I'm flying with. Friends, purposeful and competent--a coterie to be a part of!)

(Smooth air today, smooth flying. Helps sand the rough edges of anxiety.)

(Damn, that weather seems to worsening from this distance, getting closer to base. Wonder how the landing will be.)

Noemfoor looms. So does the weather. Parting from the bombers, the squadron closes on the home strip and the advancing weather. The mission was successful; now, all we have to do is land and beat the weather. It would be a tight race. Those clouds, pregnant with danger, hold lightning flashes, roars of thunder, sundering up-drafts, wrenching down-drafts, torrential downpours--Thor adds his note of drama. The strip is in sight. In seconds we are in our landing pattern, my flight the last to land. Just as I touch down, a rinse of rain begins to dot my wind screen and wings. I taxi to my parking area in the strengthening rain. As I set my brakes, the walls of the revetment are invisible in the tropical deluge.

Doc Kay

With the 41st Fighter Squadron as his backdrop, Doc Kay was able to showcase his talents, both as Flight Surgeon and as confidante. He could medically treat you, but he could also warm your heart. World War II moved along its inexorable course, and within that course Doc plied his trade, omnipresent in his care and concern for the men of the 41st. In a word, he became vital. Today, with time and hindsight and a '90s perspective, "vital" has been upgraded to "beloved."

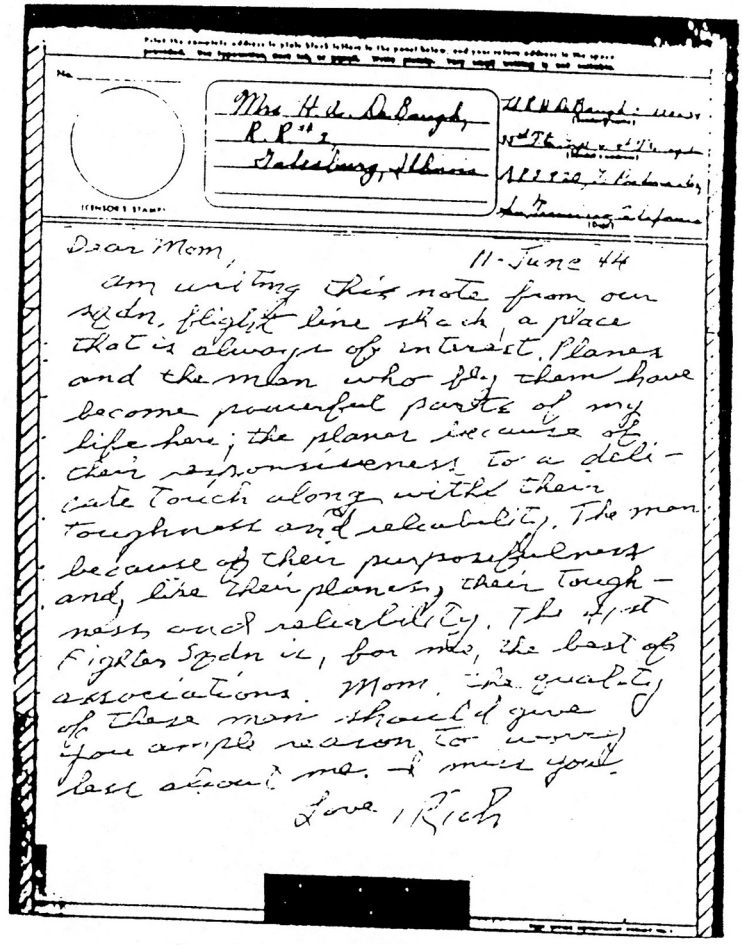
"Beloved" is a word that should be used sparingly, certainly it should be used correctly. It is a word that is a referent for one who is respected and who is held with warmth in the heart. It is a referent used for a person who is recognized for fine qualities, for displays of concern, for attitudinal empathies, for capabilities that are inspired and inventive, for drives that minister, cure, ease the ailments of those thrust into his care. "Beloved" is a term reserved for only a few, for one such as Doc Kay--Doctor Royal Kay, 41st Fighter Squadron Flight Surgeon.

Overseas, Doc Kay, in his Flight Surgeon slot, was well-grounded in reality enabling him to bring not only his medical arts to the squadron, but also his talent for seeing into the psyche so as to prevent any crisis of spirit from gaining foothold. Those overseas days were fraught with danger and risk. Anxiety was ever-present although usually sublimated. But as the 41st often witnessed fresh difficulties develop on top of trying situations, our wartime angst was leavened by Doc Kay's presence. The fact of his just being there among us was balm for the spirit, succor against the tyranny of war's demands and rigors.

As of 1994, Doc Kay, happily, is still with us. 1944 or 1994, no matter as to when, reflection brings a profusion of good thoughts about Doc, one of which is that he is beloved.

Connections

V-Mail. Correspondence quick and easy. But it was mail, a kind of lifeline to home and loved ones that worked both ways. I remember using it generously and, in fact, have a cache of fifty or so V-Mail letters to home that my Mother saved and passed on to me, found among her effects following her death. They are compelling reading even if filled with miscellanea and the commonplace. I know that my Mother revelled in these bits from her son, bits that never really told much but which must have brought her solace and relief and peace of mind. V-Mail that I received from home was rare, those letters usually being rambling, detailed, and filled with love--letters that left me at ease about home enabling me to be more effective in the South Pacific. V-Mail. Beyond its convenience and utility, it was still mail, a part of those vital connections between soldier and home. Share with me now a Zerox refreshed and renewed V-Mail letter I wrote to "Dear Mom" fifty years ago.



Mrs H. A. DeBaugh
R.F.D. #2,
Galesburg, Illinois

Dear Mom, 11-June 44

Am writing this note from our Sqdn. flight line shack, a place that is always of interest. Planes and the men who fly them have become powerful parts of my life here; the planes because of their responsiveness to a delicate touch along with their toughness and reliability. The men because of their purposefulness and, like their planes, their toughness and reliability. The 1st Fighter Sqdn is, for me, the best of associations. Mom, the quality of these men should give you ample reason to worry less about me. I miss you!

Love, Rich

41st Fighter Squadron
1995 Reunion
St. Louis

May, 1995
St. Louis Reunion
41st Fighter Squadron

Dear Friends,

One more time. One more time the muse of history, the desire to set something on the page, a wish to share with the 41st clan have all combined at times during this past year to prompt a few more mini-essays for your idle reading moments. Add them to the previous fifty-seven reminiscences (I counted them) which many of you received at past 41st reunions, and you have a sort of picture of those World War II days in the South Pacific, "our" war.

Admittedly, some of these musings may sound banal. Yet, a note of something intellectual might undergird them, even if it is a faint note. If nothing else, these musings might help build, for the receptive reader, an attitudinal compassion for our mutual past and for the "way it was."

Blue skies,

Dick DeBaugh

In Remembrance

Though their resilience and endurance were not expended, they never made it home, lost in the devouring maws of war. As the chronology of man would normally go, they went before their time. But war is not friendly to chronology and to what should have been. Even though many young 41st Fighter Squadron paladins were unseemly plucked from our midst fifty years ago, their names shall never become foreign to ear nor alien to memory. In a way, they remain with us and are a part of us. Thinking of them, we are able to relive the past knowing we are inseparably connected. While youth may have left our faces, their faces will be forever young. That is how memory works; that is how their resilience and endurance still live. Hail to you, Brave Friends! Though your corporeal existence has long since ended, you still exist through us. Life and death are too complex for facile endings; we have not yet let you go from our circle.

"Water, water, everywhere. . . ."

Once in a while, fifty years ago, some 41st Fighter Squadron members seemed to have that atabrine-hued leathery look of many, many hours in the air, of looking too long and often into the sun, of tirelessly squinting in, through, and around clouds, of fixedly peering at gauges and dials, of flying over water, of endlessly flying over water.

Think back. The vast theater that was the Pacific struggle did involve much over-water flying. On many of our missions the sea was a "presence" to be reckoned with, and reminders of over-water flying were a constant: our Mae Wests; our parachute pack with its life raft, dye marker, and shark repellent gear; that possible rendezvous point with the PBY Cat; how to ditch in seas which (we were told) had the consistency of a brick wall--all of that confidence building stuff. War was part of the tide of history, and knowing about tides was good knowledge--high tide, low tide, neap tide, whatever; not to mention calm seas, moderate seas, heavy seas, scary seas. Also, our over-water flying might have developed certain apprehensions within us. Was it real or imaginary: did those airplane engines always seem to run rougher over water than over land? What about navigation? For some 41st'ers, an eerie connection and watery wonderings existed between over-water flying and past readings: Milton's "The rising world of waters dark and deep." Keats's own epitaph, "Here lies one whose name was writ in water." And even from Genesis, "And the waters prevailed exceedingly upon the Earth."

Indeed, the 41st had its share of flying the bounding main; several tales exist to tell about that flying and are now parts of the 41st decameron. Typically, we took that flying in stride. Those sinister, implacable seas may have been at the back of our minds just as the weather was; but today, stirred by waves of nostalgia and the tides of time, we can reflect upon our over-water flying and recognize that it was just part of the job, of our work. And that we did it well. Our view of the singularity of the sea, those abandoned islands, the very vastness of the Pacific arena combine to make our mutual past pulse with currents of watery ebb and flow.

Shadows

Call it the little boy in me. Call it a quirk flavored by whimsey. Call it finding fun in phenomena. The thing is, shadows have always intrigued me. In the early part of 1995 I flew United to Las Vegas. Leaving from Chicago's O'Hare Airport, the aircraft made its turn out of traffic. Looking down from my window seat, I could see the shadow of the plane as it bounced over the terrain of buildings, trees, roads, or whatever was in the path of that shadow. Then, as the plane traversed its invisible path through air and through scattered clouds, the shadow hip-hopped from ground to clouds, from clouds to ground until the shadow disappeared from my view. It was an enchantment while it lasted, an episode that took me back fifty years, back to other times and other shadows. Notionally, shadows are among the commonplace of life. Even so, a few 41st shadow instances are glued in my memory.

It was Nadzab. I was slow-timing a Jug. My altitude was modest, perhaps a thousand feet. Remember about slow-timing? You'd just mosey around in the air trying to put an hour or two on a new engine; your mind could wander, and mine did. Glancing downward to the rear of my right wing, I saw my plane's shadow and knew that I was a part of that shadow even if an indistinguishable part. It was a strange kind of day but nice, and that shadow was clear as it cut through the thickness of trees below, trees that had a sort of foreboding darkness about them while at the same time offering up tints of lighter hues. A sight! That shadow was like an artist's mobile darting along a chiaroscuro background. Except--except that an artist would never be able to capture such a moment.

It was Wewak. The squadron's mission was to hit Wewak, and all sixteen ships made the flight there and back. The mission posed no problems, but the return flight held a show of shadows to be remembered as we overflew the Sepik River country. The day was cloudless but extremely hazy, a day

that when you were on the ground a heavy stickiness assailed you with your every movement, a day that brought welcome relief when you were airborne. The squadron was well-bunched and in good formation. I just happened to be the tail-end Charlie on this flight so I had a good view of the rest of the Buzz Saw planes ahead. It was then that I noticed those fifteen planes and their fifteen shafts of shadows reaching down through the thick and humid haze. It was as if each plane were being held up by a column of its own making. On that day the sun, our planes, and the extreme haze juxtaposed to create a most memorable mind picture. I still carry that picture.

It was Morotai. I was leading a flight of four to the one-time Japanese base of Ternate, probably a two-hour round trip flight, to check out a supposedly abandoned air strip. We were missioned to come in low, ready to strafe. And we did just that, targeting some old wooden structures which were left flaming. No enemy response. The day was perfect for flying: sunny, no wind, cloudless, a glassy sea. A Roger day for shadows if there ever was one. We kept over water for the trip home flying at about 600 feet. By fortuitous chance, my eye happened upon our shadows, black planes gliding on motionless azure water--old Neptune's allies. The formation was tight, making the sight even more impressive. But it was not a moment for shadow reverie; a couple of quick glances more were all the indulgence a flight leader could allow himself. Anyway, that kind of beauty is fleeting.

Indeed, shadows are so often transitory, noticed for a second in life, then forgotten. Still, the memory of certain shadows can be permanent. Nadzab. Wewak. Morotai.

Empty Cot

A tentmate was gone. A life had ended, an existence snuffed out. The evidence of this was acute in its stark reality: an empty cot.

For the tentmates of him who had been taken from their circle, the old banter and raillery was now gone, gone for a while, at least, because this kind of heartbreak simply had to be lived through. That's the way it was. The tent became a different place, and he who was gone became seared into the memories of his tentmates, memories never to be erased. Of course, those tentmates knew what would happen next. The cot would be filled again, probably by someone new in the outfit, a replacement for one, it was momentarily felt, who was beyond replacement. Life in the tent was forever changed; but, as expected, life went on with a different personality present to exert his subtle influence. The new guy was quickly accepted, and a slightly altered comity soon developed in the tent. The new guy was never looked upon as an intruder; he merely took the place of an old friend and soon became a new friend. It was just that simple even though the old friend was fixed in the memory, eventually to become a mythic figure of respect, admiration, and deserving of the constancy of recall that he was given.

In the course of its life overseas, the 41st Fighter Squadron experienced many empty cots. They were expected as a part of wartime life, but they were never easy to deal with. An empty cot could create a raging helplessness, a realization of war's futility, a reminder that we were merely frail human beings with weaknesses and passions. But the men of the 41st were a steadfast lot. An empty cot was never an overture to fear. Rather, it was a symbol that caused the squadron to become more resolute in its pursuit of personal and unit aims, a symbol that gave strength to each squadron member as well as to the 41st's "raison d'étre." Still, we sensed deep loss in the presence of an empty cot, an ultimate metaphor of war.

A Little Airplane Music, Please

We're talking here about airplanes that were running well, not those that had to be written up on the Form 5. Remember? Those missions when your plane ran so beautifully and smoothly? When it made music? Music, of course, comes in many ways and in many modes. The smooth running airplane made its own distinct sounds of music, never atonal nor discordant. Never dissonant. Always--always these sounds were pleasing to the ear; and they were usually taken for granted. Until, that is, one of the gremlins of aviation stepped in to exert his mischief. Then, airplane troubles might follow and make a pilot wish for the music that was so gentle on the ear and so secure to the spirit.

Perhaps the most satisfying music was a smooth running engine. Most of my thinking and remembering deals with the "Jug." A smooth running engine was a troubadour love song, and that old Pratt-Whitney sang with a throaty resonance that was downright sexy. Other musical sounds? There were many. How about that "thwock, thwock" of your wheels as they nestled into their wheel wells? Or that pianissimo whirr singing to you as your flaps raised or lowered? Then there was that wonderful airplane sound (which could vary depending on how you brought her in) when your wheels kissed the runway at the conclusion of a mission--the ultimate coda.

Your guns. That fortissimo staccato threat of eight fifty caliber machine guns--fury unleashed, yet beautiful music--was part of the concert.

Slicing through air with canopy slightly open, ah, now there was tonal beauty enhanced by the swirl of fresh air into the cockpit. It is another one of those sounds that remains with the maestro/pilot. It is a sound, like all the others, that wells up in the memory even after fifty years. Equate those sounds, that music, with what you choose--symphonic orchestra, concert grand, violin, big band. It matters not

what mode. Climbing, diving, flirting with clouds, searing the "deck," soaring at altitude, taking off, landing--all offered their specialities of music.

As though responding to a maestro's baton, the nuances of a plane's music were discernible. The deft and learned touch on throttle, prop pitch, stick, and rudder resulted in subtleties of altered sound. As did the firmer, more active control touches. Oh, that baton could elicit beautiful and soulful sounds--exultant sounds, muted sounds, delicate sounds, even unheard Valkyrian sounds.

It startles and waylays the mind: that a machine of war--deliverer of death and destruction--could create its own kind of music; music that, in retrospect, had its very own kind of charm. Music hath charm? Of course it does. Part of the magic of music is that it can be found in unlikely places. Like in a smooth running airplane.

The Waiting Game

Time. Time's movement is inexorable in its advance. But there were occasions, overseas, when time seemed to stand static, rigidly unmoving like a soldier at attention. Life seemed to be a strangely fixed tableau as we of the 41st Fighter Squadron simply waited, waited for the end of our duty when orders to return stateside arrived. We played the waiting game.

The only rules of the game were those individually imposed by the players on themselves. That is, if things like patience, resignation, and languor of attitude could be called rules. That seasonless tropics tableau--and, later on, north toward the horse latitudes--was seldom conducive to letting one feel the passage of time. Even though we were aware of day becoming night and night becoming day, we still uttered maledictions against the slow passage of time; and time, whether it passed slowly or seemed to stop, became one of the emblems of war. Time, as an emblem, was just another one of the faces of war to which we became accustomed. Although we were strong young men, lethargic time still attempted to rob us of our savoir faire and poise as well as our dignity which we thought to be indestructible.

Orders to go home were a kind of El Dorado, a treasure to be had if we lived through the brambles, snags, and pitfalls of our fighting futures. So time glacially moved, if at all, while we played the waiting game. Perhaps, time was one of the horrors of war, lingering over all. The seeming standstill nature of time--given emphasis and reality by merely being away from home and family--is something that probably has affected all soldiers. From a previous generation, my own father alluded to the matter of time in "his" war, WW I. He referred to the "elasticity of time" and meant that it could speed by or stand still depending on the situation. "The minutes drag by; the years race by." Verdun. Marne. Ypres. The soldiers of the

last generation certainly knew about time and sensed that, as a danger, time was not only conjecture but fact. Port Moresby. Gusap. Mangaldan. Like those in WW I, we of WW II contended with the contrariness of time. Time was a factor, a force, in daily living.

Historians have spoken of the "stretch of time" as they have attempted to bring perspective to the grand themes of history which man has experienced. Time is elastic; it does stretch back and forth as the memory does its time traveling. While the movement of time has allowed us to become historical figures, there were those occasions when time seemed to thwart us in our desires to see the Grail of tour's end and to return home. When we played the waiting game.